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ONGOING OPERATION

Maoist killed in Sukma encounter, say police

NEWS » PAGE 10

ON THE BOIL

Protests rage in Nepal with Oli remanded for five days

WORLD » PAGE 14

EXTENDED RANGE

North Korea tests new missile engine

WORLD » PAGE 14

LIVELIHOOD WOES

A missed chance to guarantee minimum wages

VB-G RAM G Act fails to address a key issue

EDITORIAL » PAGE 8

CLINICAL CHASE

Rickelton, Rohit guide Mumbai home in style

SPORT » PAGE 15

BJP is the 'A team' of Kerala, says Modi at campaign meet

Abdul Latheef Naha
PALAKKAD

Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressing a public gathering in Palakkad on Sunday.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday intensified the National Democratic Alliance (NDA)'s campaign for the April 9 Kerala Assembly election with a sharp attack on both the ruling Left Democratic Front (LDF) and the Opposition United Democratic Front (UDF) as he visited the southern State that has been out of bounds for the alliance.

Alleging that the two fronts had alternated in power for decades while "looting" the State through corruption and misgovernance, Mr. Modi said their politics had deprived the people of Kerala of resources, opportunities, and growth. The Prime Minister alleged that both the UDF and the LDF were misleading the public by labelling each other the B-team of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). "That is an inadvertent admission by both fronts that the BJP is the real A team in Kerala," he said.

Positioning the BJP-led NDA as a decisive alternative, the Prime Minister said that an NDA government would advance the vision of a "Viksit Kerala," promising faster development and measures to curb the emigration of educated youth by creating opportunities within the State. "It is Modi's guarantee to you. The NDA's guarantee is Modi's guarantee," he said while addressing a rally of all 12 NDA candidates from Palakkad district at Fort Grounds at 2 p.m., where a large crowd gathered braving the intense summer heat to attend the event.

CONTINUED ON
» PAGE 10
'DE-RISKING PEOPLE'
» PAGE 11

Iran warns against ground invasion amid talks in Pak.

'Waiting for troops to set them on fire', says Iran Speaker; Pak. says it will soon host U.S.-Iran talks after regional Ministers meet in Islamabad; meet a cover for U.S. to deploy more troops, says Iran

Associated Press
ISLAMABAD

Foreign Ministers of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Turkiye meet in Islamabad on Sunday to discuss the West Asia situation. REUTERS

Iranian forces were "waiting for the arrival of American troops on the ground to set them on fire and punish their regional partners forever", Iran's state media reported Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf as saying on Sunday while warning the U.S. against a ground invasion. The remarks came as Pakistan announced on Sunday that it will soon host talks between the U.S. and Iran.

"Pakistan is very happy that both Iran and the U.S. have expressed their confidence in Pakistan's facilitation" of the talks, which will happen in the "coming days," Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar said in a televised speech after top diplomats from regional countries met in Islamabad.

There was no immediate word from the U.S. or Iran.

Foreign Ministers of Saudi Arabia, Turkiye, and Egypt were in Islamabad on Sunday for talks without U.S. or Israeli participation in a push to broker an end to the month-long war.

The Iranian Speaker dismissed Sunday's talks as a cover while the U.S. dispatches additional troops to West Asia.

The visiting Ministers have endorsed Pakistan's peace efforts, Mr. Dhar said without specifying whether the proposed talks would be direct or indirect. The Ministers are expected to meet again on Monday. Israel and the U.S., however, kept up strikes on Iran on Sunday, and Tehran responded by firing missiles and drones across West Asia.

CONTINUED ON
» PAGE 10
RELATED REPORTS ON
» PAGES 10 & 14

Challenging times, says PM on West Asia crisis

NEW DELHI
Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday, in his monthly *Mann Ki Baat* address, noted that the situation in West Asia had created "challenging times" and called for those "politicising" the issue to refrain from doing so. » PAGE 10

NEARBY

LPG crunch revives firewood economy

BENGALURU
The demand for firewood has seen a sharp rise across several rural and semi-urban parts of Karnataka in recent weeks, as disruptions in the supply of LPG has pushed households and businesses back to traditional cooking fuel.
» PAGE 3

Over 60 fall ill after eating prasada

BENGALURU
More than 60 people fell ill after consuming prasada during the Ramnavami celebrations in Bengaluru Rural district on Saturday. » PAGE 2

EDUCATIONPLUS » PAGE 7

'I am the candidate in all seats,' says Mamata

Shiv Sahay Singh
Shrabana Chatterjee
KOLKATA

Mamata Banerjee

Urging the West Bengal electorate to have faith in her, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Sunday said people should consider her as the candidate contesting all 294 seats of the State Assembly.

"Mothers and sisters, will you vote for us or not? Forget who is your candidate, I am the candidate everywhere. We will be the ones forming the government," the Trinamool Congress chairperson told a gathering in Purulia district.

Party general secretary Abhishek Banerjee also made similar comments at a gathering in Murshidabad on Sunday when faced with slogans from the crowd expressing displeasure over candidate selection. "If anyone is dissatisfied with the candidate, then think that I, Abhishek Banerjee, am contesting from here," he said.

CONTINUED ON
» PAGE 10

Viral prison video may have been staged

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

A dramatic turn has emerged in the controversy over a viral video from Parappana Agrahara Central Prison, which allegedly showed inmates enjoying luxury facilities inside the jail.

Preliminary investigation, according to officials, indicate that the footage may have been part of a deliberate smear campaign aimed at the Director-General of Police (DGP), Prisons and Correctional Services, Alok Kumar. This campaign was allegedly created in retaliation to a series of crackdowns on illegal activities and the curbing of VIP treatment within prisons.

According to prison sources, the footage was allegedly orchestrated by a group of inmates identified as Darshan, Abhi, and Andrews, in suspected collusion with a group of staff members.

The trio is believed to have recorded and circulated the video to tarnish the reputation of senior prison authorities.

The alleged video recently went viral on social media platforms, prompting an investigation by the Police Department. The video purportedly showed prisoners using mobile phones, watching television, and accessing streaming platforms.

CONTINUED ON
» PAGE 6

How delayed polls choked city's air quality

Chetan B.C.
BENGALURU

Dust stirred up by vehicles is a major contributor to air pollution, causing a serious health consequences, in Bengaluru.
K. MURALI KUMAR

The delay in holding civic body polls has not only affected local administration in Bengaluru but has also led to the stalling of a whopping ₹1,475.90 crore under the 15th Finance Commission's million-plus cities challenge, aimed at improving air quality.

While the stalled funds themselves appear mammoth, the impact of losing them has also affected air quality and particulate matter levels in Bengaluru, which have seen a steady rise over the last five years. For example, the Air Quality Index (AQI), which earlier averaged between the 60s and 90s in the city, has now crossed the 120 mark. In March 2026, the highest recorded AQI stood at 141, according to the city AQI dashboard.

What is the programme?
The Union government launched the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) in 2019 to improve air quality across the country. Cities receive funds to improve air quality either under NCAP or under the 15th Finance Commission's scheme called the million-plus cities challenge, a performance-based incentive for air quality improvement and solid waste management. Bengaluru was deemed eligible to receive grants from the 15th Finance Commission.

Accordingly, documents accessed by *The Hindu* show that Bengaluru received funds for two consecutive financial years, FY 2021-22 and FY 2022-23. However, after that, the city received no funding.

According to Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) sources, the criteria to receive grants were amended in 2023, making it mandatory to have an elected urban local body. For the erstwhile Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) area, civic polls were last held in 2015, and councillors' terms ended in 2020, after which elections have not been conducted.

CONTINUED ON
» PAGE 2

Ministry of Home Affairs
Government of India
सत्यमेव जयते

भारत की जनगणना 2027 CENSUS OF INDIA
जनगणना से जन कल्याण

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OUR DEVELOPMENT

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- Mark your house location on the Digital Map
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- Keep your SE ID safe
- Provide the SE ID to the Enumerator when they visit
- The Enumerator will verify the information

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Selection of Test venues: tradition goes for a toss

The rotation system was introduced to ensure that everyone got their fair share of matches but now it's a system that exists either only on paper or in one's imagination because clearly, in reality, it has been given the heave-ho

R. Kaushik

Think V.V.S. Laxman, and the first number that springs to mind is 281. There is more to the classy Hyderabadi than that epochal number – as evidenced by the title of his autobiography, *281 and Beyond* – but Laxman's career will forever be defined by 281.

After all, it was that knock which changed the landscape of Indian cricket, maybe even of Test cricket. It came against all odds; Australia were sitting on a 16-Test winning streak, had battered India into submission inside three days in the opening game of a three-match series in Mumbai just 10 days previously, and had understandably enforced the follow-on in the second Test after leading by 274 in the first innings.

Understandably, because in three previous completed innings in the series, India's scores were 176, 219 and 171. For Steve Waugh to believe that 274 was far too many in the bank wasn't fanciful; his crack bowling unit had taken only 58.1 overs, spread over an overnight break, to run through India in their first dig, so it made sense to strike when the iron was hot.

But what's it they say about the best laid plans of men and mice? Despite an improved batting display in their second innings, India were still in trouble at 115 for three, Sachin Tendulkar dismissed for a second score of 10 in the match, when skipper Sourav Ganguly walked in at No. 5. Normally, he would have punched gloves with Rahul Dravid, his deputy. Instead, in what turned out to be a masterstroke, the man who greeted him in the middle was Laxman, promoted to No. 3 after his first-innings 59, the lone score of more than 25 in India's 171.

Even when Ganguly helped Laxman add 117 for the fourth wicket, Australia were in control; at the captain's dismissal, India were 42 short of making the Aussies bat again. Laxman and Dravid, maybe hurting inside at being demoted but never complaining because he was the ultimate team man, represented the last specialist pair. One more strike, and Australia were into Nayan Mongia and then the bowlers.

That one more strike, history will testify, was 376 runs and 104.1 overs in coming. Laxman and Dravid, who had had numerous grand alliances for South Zone in domestic cricket, reprised the *jugalbandi* at the grandest stage of all, batting through the entire fourth day unseparated. When Laxman was eventually dismissed on day five, he had overhauled Sunil Gavaskar's 236 not out to produce India's highest individual Test score. Dravid's masterpiece ended on 180, Ganguly declared at 657 for seven, and Harbhajan Singh and Tendulkar combined to send the visitors packing for 212. India had somehow pulled off a miracle, winning by 171 runs to square the series and going on to complete a fairytale series triumph with a tense victory in the decider in Chennai.

An epic

That epic second Test in 2001, between March 11 and 15, unfolded at the theatre of dreams - and sometimes nightmares, too - that is Kolkata's Eden Gardens. On day one of the game, Harbhajan became the first Indian to take a Test hat-trick. On day four, Laxman went past Gavaskar's 236*. And on day five, India rewrote history by becoming only the third team to win a Test after being forced to follow-on.

Laxman, Dravid and Harbhajan played several other Tests at the Eden and enjoyed stellar successes, but not against Australia for the rest of their careers even though the Aussies toured India in 2004, 2008 and 2010 when the trio was still active. Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma and R. Ashwin, all retired from Test cricket, didn't play Australia at the Eden at all. And now, it looks as if Jasprit Bumrah, acknowledged as the greatest all-format bowler of certainly his and potentially any generation, will join that elite list.

Welcome to the strange, quirky, predictably predictable world of Indian cricket. Eden Gardens is in good company, let's not forget. One of Laxman's less celebrated but no less magical knocks came at Mumbai's Wankhede Stadium, also against Australia, in November 2004. It was the last match of a four-fixture faceoff; India trailed 0-2, having surrendered a Test series at home to the Antipodeans for the first time in more than three decades. Despite Shane Warne sitting out the 'dead rubber' on a minefield, they were rolled over for 104, to which the Aussies replied with 203. A 99-run lead on a surface of that nature was pure gold but Laxman and Tendulkar put on their dancing shoes, producing a veritable feast during which they made it seem as if they were batting on a shirtfront.

During a third-wicket alliance of 91, they drove Ricky Ponting ragged. Tendulkar weighed in with 55 of the very best, Laxman was subliminally brilliant during his 69. Even though Michael Clarke (6/9) sparked a spectacular collapse of six for 23, India defended 107 with tigerish zeal, Harbhajan and Murali Kartik bowling them to a 13-run victory with five for 29. Oh, what drama.

The 171-run heist in 2001 remains the last time India took on Australia at the Eden; the teams haven't also met each other in a Test at the Wankhede since the 13-run jailbreak in 2004. So much for the weight of history, of celebrating 'traditional' centres, of doing everything to keep Test cricket 'alive and vibrant', as the Board of Control for Cricket in India loves to point out time and again.

That it's not enough to merely provide lip service to maintaining the primacy of the five-day game has never been more apparent in the last few days, since the venues for the five-Test home series for the Border-Gavaskar Trophy beginning next January were announced. This is the first time since 1979-80 that the Aussies will be playing at least five Tests in India; of the one-time marquee Test centres, only Chennai's M.A. Chidambaram Stadium has been considered worthy of staging a match of this import and pedigree. The others bestowed the privilege of playing host are Nagpur, Ranchi, Guwahati and Ahmedabad.

In the last few years, ever since the sprawling Narendra Modi Stadium replaced the old Sardar Patel Stadium in Motera in 2021, Ahmedabad has become a near-permanent stop in all big-ticket series/competitions. It's hosted several Tests, among them against England and Australia, and it was where the final of the 50-over World Cup in 2023 and the T20 World Cup earlier this month were conducted. One can understand the desire to take World Cup and IPL finals to a ground that can house between 103,000 and 125,000 fans - depending on who one talks to - but whether its vastness alone is enough for Test matches to repeatedly be held there is another matter altogether.

Audiences for Tests have been dwindling in India for a while now, making it imperative to figure out which are the centres where there is still a demand for the red-ball format

New entrant

Now, jostling for pre-eminence is the Assam Cricket Association Stadium in Guwahati, which last November became India's 30th Test venue. By no stretch of the imagination is Guwahati a 'traditional' cricketing centre. There is a huge clamour for white-ball fireworks, like it is in several non-Tier 1 cricketing venues in the country, but the patronage for the inaugural Test at the ground, against recently crowned World Test champions South Africa, was worse than disappointing. For Guwahati to be given the opportunity to hold another Test against one of the top teams in the world is a massive surprise, but only when you disregard the fact that the current secretary of the BCCI hails from that part of the country. Power centres in sports associations will inevitably shift and be redefined, but should staging centres follow suit depending on who occupies the corridors of power? What happened to the acclaimed rotation policy aimed at equitable distribution of matches across the length and the breadth of the country? Given India's size, the immense revenue generated by the BCCI and the distribution of much of that revenue to its member associations to improve cricketing infrastructure, among other things, India boast a plethora of world-class stadiums. The rotation system was introduced to ensure that everyone got their fair share of matches but now it's a system that exists either only on paper or in one's imagination because clearly, in reality, it has been given the heave-ho.

Audiences for Test matches have been dwindling in India for a while now, which makes it imperative for those entrusted with deciding which matches are played where to figure out which are the centres where there is still a demand for the red-ball format. There are enough limited-overs internationals - meaningful or otherwise - to be distributed to the others. It is essential that Test cricket isn't spread thin by doling out its staging rights to all and sundry. How will Shubman Gill and Bumrah, Steve Smith and Pat Cummins, be energised by having to play high-stakes, high-profile Tests in front of less than 5,000 spectators, several of whom have been ferried through inducements rather than out of a great love for the game? Are we so caught up in the game of one-upmanship that the actual game becomes a casualty?

There is much to commend the BCCI for. The number of matches it conducts annually - and seamlessly - across genders and age groups is staggering. It hasn't been miserly with its vast coffers, taking care of not just its members (vote banks, if you like, though developments over the last decade have precluded the need for elections in recent AGMs) but also of the players - both international and domestic. It hasn't been so blinded by the lure of the lucre that it has neglected the grassroots. It's credit to the governing body in the country that it has managed to attract and hold the interest of several legends, including Ravi Shastri, Dravid and Laxman, among others, in coaching and administrative roles with an eye on both the present and the future.

For all its commitment to the sport and its practitioners, it has still been a soft target for many with an axe to grind. But it must also acknowledge that one mustn't just be fair but must also be seen to be fair. And surely, there isn't a lot fair in cricket-crazy fans in Kolkata and Mumbai waiting 25 and 22 years respectively, unsuccessfully, to welcome an India vs Australia Test match?

THE GIST

- In the last few years, ever since the sprawling Narendra Modi Stadium replaced the old Sardar Patel Stadium in Motera in 2021, Ahmedabad has become a near-permanent stop in all big-ticket series/competitions
- Now, jostling for pre-eminence is the Assam Cricket Association Stadium in Guwahati, which last November became India's 30th Test venue. By no stretch of the imagination is Guwahati a 'traditional' cricketing centre
- There are enough limited-overs internationals – meaningful or otherwise – to be distributed to the others. It is essential that Test cricket isn't spread thin by doling out its staging rights to all and sundry

Eden Gardens and Wankhede.
FILE PHOTOS: V.V. KRISHNAN

‘Civic bodies’ per capita spending varies by 2.5 times’

In spending terms, across all five city corporations, public works accounts for 50% to 69% of the total expenditure

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

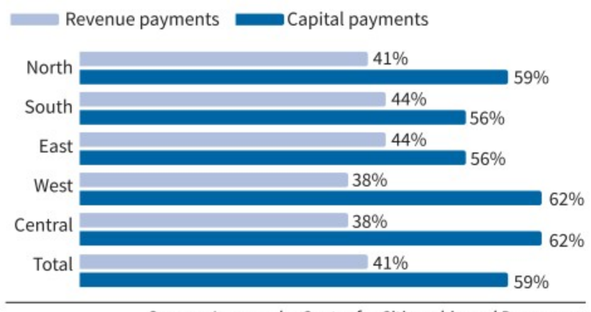
The total outlay of each of the newly formed Bengaluru corporations ranges between ₹3,400 crore and ₹4,700 crore, but the per capita outlay varies sharply by nearly 2.5 times across corporations, according to a budget analysis by Janaagraha Centre for Citizenship and Democracy.

For example, the East corporation’s per capita outlay is ₹45,473, which is substantially higher than the West corporation’s, whose estimation is pegged at ₹17,728. This highlights the uneven distribution of resources across corporations. The per capita outlay refers to the average amount a corporation allocates per resident in its jurisdiction. The estimation is done using the population figure based on the 2011 census.

Per capita outlay

North	South	East	West	Central
₹24,213.32	₹23,503.78	₹45,473.18	₹17,728.43	₹27,365.49

Spending priorities



Source: Janaagraha Centre for Citizenship and Democracy

A view of the Greater Bengaluru Authority building. FILE PHOTO

Citizens and urban governance

- East corporation introduces ‘BECC Public Dashboard’ with ward, department-level details
- West corporation stresses community participation, plans to disclose and GIS-tag 1,946 assets; citizens must ensure all new projects—across agencies and schemes—are added to the asset register
- North corporation introduces Friday phone-in grievance redressal, expands e-governance (E-Khata, E-TDR), while Central and North run 24/7 control rooms for faster complaint resolution
- All corporations use social media for real-time updates and citizen feedback

> There is a need for the State government, the GBA and the new municipal corporations to prove themselves to the citizens. That can only come from radical transparency in civic works and spending at the first mile, i.e., citizens need to have real-time access to expenditure at the street and neighbourhood level
>
> **SRIKANTH VISHWANATHAN,** CEO, Janaagraha

Key takeaways

- Concerns over democratic legitimacy as the budgets are presented without elected councils
- Relevance of budgets as they are presented just ahead of civic polls
- Budgets have combined outlay: **₹20,217 crore**, up just **1%** from last year
- Capital spending dominates in the budgets, accounting for nearly **60%** of total expenditure
- Development works take the largest share across corporations (**41%–63%**)
- North (**23%**) and West (**31%**) depend on State capital grants; East relies far less (**10%**)

Source: Janaagraha Centre for Citizenship and Democracy

Outlay and difference

The report states that the five newly formed city corporations have presented a combined budget of ₹20,217 crore for 2026-27, marking a modest 1% increase over last year’s ₹19,927 crore.

While the overall outlay signals continuity (investing in long-term assets and infrastructure), the analysis points to variations in spending patterns and priorities across the corporations. It noted that there is relatively less investment in human development and environmental aspects compared with physical infrastructure. For example, of the total spending, ₹10,401 crore is earmarked for capital payments, compared to ₹7,149 crore for revenue expenditure. Capital spending thus accounts for nearly 60% of the total expenditure, indicating a city-wide push toward asset creation and infrastructure expansion.

In spending terms, across all five corporations, public works accounts for 50% to 69% of total expenditure. The investments in development works such as roads, drainage systems, flyovers, and other infrastructure projects make up 41% to 63% of expenditure, but the share varies across corporations. While the East and Central corporations allocate over 60% toward such works, the North and South corporations lag behind at 41% and 47%, respectively.

In contrast, allocations to core social sectors remain minimum. Public health accounts for just 2% to 3% of spending, education around 1%, and urban forestry between 0% and 1%. However, solid waste management remains a uniformly prioritised sector, receiving 10% to 12% of total expenditure across all corporations.

North spending

The North corporation stands out for its higher spending on establishment and programmes. It allocates 17% of its budget to establishment costs and 11% to programme expenses.

Programme expenditure, covering health, education, and welfare, stands at ₹321 crore, driven largely by an expansive social welfare agenda. At ₹289 crore, the North corporation also has the largest social welfare budget among the five.

How the five new city corporations differ in what they earn and what they spend

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

As five city corporations roll out their maiden budgets, the numbers show a divide in how much each corporation can raise and how much they must depend on outside support.

With the mix of revenue sources, the report by Janaagraha Centre for Citizenship and Democracy explains how the East and Central corporations draw a larger share from taxes (property tax), while North and West rely more on non-tax revenues. South stands relatively balanced. While property tax remains the backbone across all five, its strength varies. It contributes 51% of its own source revenue in East and 42% in Central, but drops to around 34-37% in North, West and South.

Where tax revenues fall short, draft budget estimates show how State support steps in. West depends heavily on this, with 31% of its revenue coming from Karnataka government capital grants, followed by North at 23%. In contrast, East receives just 10% from such grants. This also explains the corporation’s ability to generate taxes. East raises 24% of its revenue through taxes, compared to only 18% in North and 17% in West. This imbalance shows how much of their spending corporations can fund on their own. Across the city, only about ₹55 out of every ₹100 spent comes from internal sources. East, North and South manage to cover about 57% of their expenditure this way, Central about 55%, and West just 50%.

Fact sheet

Corporation	Property tax (₹ per capita)
East	13,097
West	3,266
North	4,608
Central	6,229
South	4,792

Source: Janaagraha Centre for Citizenship and Democracy

The gap becomes sharper when seen per person (per capita). The East corporation generates ₹45,455 per capita, higher than West (₹39,007) and North (₹38,312), while Central trails at ₹27,367. This means the East has nearly ₹18,000 more per capita than Central to spend on civic services. A major driver of this is property tax collection per capita. In the East, it stands at ₹13,097, far ahead of West (₹3,266) and North (₹4,608). Central (₹6,229) and South (₹4,792) fall in between. High-value commercial and IT corridors such as Whitefield, Marathahalli and Sarjapur drive up collections in the East. Meanwhile, West and North, with a larger share of residential and peri-urban areas, generate less per person. Central and South fall in between, shaped by older properties, institutional land and relatively stable but lower-value real estate. As for Central, despite lower per capita revenue, it generates the highest property tax per square kilometre, i.e., ₹10 crore because of dense commercial and institutional concentration in the city’s core.

From Page One

How delayed civic polls choked Bengaluru’s air quality

As a result, BBMP has missed out on securing ₹1,475.90 crore, which could have been used to address the rising levels of Particulate Matter 10 (PM10) in the city.

Compounding the problem, BBMP also failed to utilise the funds it had earlier received. Between 2021 and 2023, the 15th Finance Commission released ₹572 crore under the Solid Waste Management (SWM) component and ₹256 crore under the air quality component.

An emergency response plan has also been prepared to tackle air pollution during critical situations; the committee has identified nine hotspots and action plans have been formulated

Although the local body had ₹828 crore at its disposal, its utilisation began only in 2023, according to the PRAANA portal set up to monitor the release and usage of funds.

Where were the funds used?

Recently, Bangalore Central MP P.C. Mohan raised a question in the Lok Sabha regarding NCAP/15th Finance Commission funds allocated to Bengaluru and their utilisation.

The response showed that Bengaluru has used the funds to plant green cover over 1,25,290 square metres, collect 2,72,000 tonnes of construction and demolition (C&D) waste, procure and deploy 127 new electric buses, and intervene at 20 traffic congestion points, among several other measures.

In what comes as a welcome move, the civic authority has finally started discussions on improving air quality and greening urban spaces. According to GBA sources, Chief Commissioner M. Maheshwar Rao has been emphasising the need to green urban spaces and median lines during meetings.

“Once GBA elections are conducted and a local governance body is elected, we will be eligible for funds and start receiving them. The action plan for intervention is ready, and we have obtained government approval,” a GBA source told *The Hindu*.

Further, a city-level monitoring and implementation committee has been formed to oversee the approved city action plan. An emergency response plan has also been prepared to tackle air pollution during critical situations. The committee has identified nine hotspots (high-emission zones), and action plans have been formulated to address them.

10 dogs find homes in city

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

In a bid to improve stray dog management efforts, the Bengaluru South City Corporation on Sunday organised a first-of-its-kind indie puppy adoption drive in Jayanagar to promote animal welfare.

Over 100 dog lovers gathered at the Shalini Ground in Jayanagar for the drive titled ‘Adopt, don’t shop’. Sreenath, the Chief Veterinary Officer of the South corporation, told *The Hindu* that 10 dogs were adopted during the drive.

“Currently, we have 35 puppies up for adoption, and interested dog lovers can still visit our South corporation office and adopt dogs if they missed the drive. As promoting adoption is a humane way of managing stray dogs, this drive was taken up,” he said. The corporation plans to hold similar drives every three months at different locations, following the response, despite the drive not receiving widespread promotion, according to Dr. Sreenath.

Corporation officials said that the drive encourages people to shift to adoption rather than buying dogs, which will help in reducing the popularity of commercial dog breeding systems.

The major highlight of the event was Sanjana Raj’s adoption of an injured dog that had been left limping. “The compassion from Ms. Raj towards stray dogs and her gesture reinforces the corporation’s belief that promoting adoption works,” Dr. Sreenath said.

The adoption activities were carried out as per the Animal Welfare Board of India rules, with an undertaking obtained from the adopter along with their signatures. To list dogs for adoption, the South corporation has a criterion that the puppy must be more than two months old and completely weaned from the mother. Generally, dogs are neutered after they turn six months old, so none of the dogs up for adoption were neutered. However, all of them were dewormed and vaccinated. If one wishes to get their adopted dog neutered, the corporation has asked them to approach it and get the dog neutered through its Animal Birth Control (ABC) programme.

The corporation will remain in regular contact with the adopter, and the required assistance will be provided. Dogs that were not adopted will be released back to the same streets from where they were picked up, which is mandatory under the ABC rules. The Central corporation was the first civic body to roll out an adoption scheme, and it later became a routine practice for all corporations.

IPL ticket-metro integration draws over 22,000 commuters

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

The post-match dispersal was completed within 50 minutes, with trains running at three-minute intervals

Metro ridership more than doubled during the opening IPL 2026 match in Bengaluru on Saturday, with over 22,000 passengers using services under a new ticket integration model introduced by the Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BMRCL) at the M. Chinnaswamy Stadium.

The initiative, implemented in coordination with the Bengaluru City Police, the Karnataka State Cricket Association, and Royal Challengers Bengaluru, allowed match tickets embedded with metro QR codes to double as free travel passes. Spectators could commute from any metro station to Cubbon Park or M.G. Road stations and return without purchasing separate tickets.

According to a release by BMRCL, the move saw a sharp rise in ridership compared to the usual 8,000 to 10,000 commuters on match days, while also easing congestion and parking pressure in the central business district.

The release stated that BMRCL ensured smooth operations through coordinated crowd management and increased train frequency. The post-match dispersal of over 22,000 passengers was completed within 50 minutes, with trains running at three-minute intervals.

Four drown

The Hindu Bureau
YADGIR

In a tragic incident, four children, two of a family and two of their relatives, drowned in a krishi honda (farm pond) in an agricultural field in Naganur village in Shorapur taluk of Yadgir district on Sunday.

The deceased have been identified as six-year-old Kiran, 11-year-old Basamma, six-year-old Sharat and seven-year-old Hanumesh.

Investigation is on.

Over 60 fall ill after consuming *prasada*

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

More than 60 people fell ill after consuming *prasada* during the Ramnavami celebrations at Bettenahalli village, Devanahalli taluk, Bengaluru Rural district, on Saturday.

Around 400 people had consumed the *prasada* in the morning, of whom several began experiencing symptoms such as abdominal cramps, vomiting and diarrhoea after 10 hours. “Around 60 reported symptoms from 1 a.m. onwards on Sunday and all of them are out of danger,” Lakka Krishna Reddy, Bengaluru Rural District Health Officer (DHO), told *The Hindu*.

He said most of the affected were treated at the Aradeshanahalli Primary Health Centre in Devanahalli, while some were shifted to nearby private healthcare facilities. Dr. Reddy said several of those admitted as inpatients had been treated and discharged, while around 14 persons received treatment in private facilities.

The DHO said that the situation is under control.

PUBLIC NOTICE

The General Public are hereby notified that, my clients have agreed to purchase the Schedule property from its owners: **Y.S.JYOTHIDEVI W/o Late Shashikumar.M and her children Sri.M.S.AJAYPRASAD and Sri.M.S.ABHAYACHANDRA,** residing at: No.115/10, Sharadhi, 15th Cross Road, Opp.Poornima Clinic, Vyalikaval, Bengaluru – 560 003.

Apart from the said owners, if any other person/s have any manner of right, title and or interest or claim or charge or lien over the Schedule property or otherwise have any lawful objection/s for sale of the Schedule Property by the aforesaid owners, they are hereby called upon to file their objection/s in writing, along with the photocopies of documents on which they rely, with the undersigned, within 14 days from the date of publication of this notice. Objection/s received thereafter will not be binding on my clients.

SCHEDULE

All that piece and parcel of the residential property bearing Municipal No.20/01 (CITB/BDA Site No.369), PID No.53-5-20/01, having E-PID No.1354150711, measuring East to West 56 ft and North to South 31 ft, in all measuring 1736 Sq.ft, with an old house thereon comprised of ground and first floors, situated at 5th Main Road, Srinagar, Banashankari 1st Stage, 1st Block, Bangalore-560050 and bounded on:

East by : Property bearing No.430
West by : Road
North by : Property bearing No.370
South by : Road

Sd/- S.F. GOUTAM CHAND, Advocate
GOUTAM ASSOCIATES,
No.60, 2nd Floor, Old Kanakapura Road,
Basavanagudi, Bengaluru - 560004

IN THE COURT OF HON’BLE XXV ADDITIONAL CITY CIVIL & SESSIONS JUDGE, AT BENGALURU (CCH-23)
OS. No. 793/2024

BETWEEN : Incanus Newton School Technologies Pvt. Ltd. Office at 3rd Floor, No.2, 26, 27 and 3, Krishna Nagar Industrial Area, Sona Towers, Hosur Main Road, Bengaluru, Karnataka - 560029 ...PLAINTIFF

AND : Prashant Shrivastava and Ors ...DEFENDANT

SUMMONS TO DEFENDANT NO.1 BY WAY OF PAPER PUBLICATION

To, Mr. Prashant Shrivastava, S/o Jal Prakash Shrivastava, Aged about 25 years old, Kunwarpur, Udham Singh Nagar, Uttarakhand, 263146. ...DEFENDANT NO.1

Whereas the above-named Plaintiff has instituted an injunction suit against you seeking permanent injunction restraining you and Defendant No.2 or his agent/s or servant/s from posting, circulating, and publishing any kind of defamatory statements on any social media including but not limited to Defendant No.3 platform against the Plaintiff Company.

You are hereby summoned to appear before the court on the **22nd Day of April 2026 at 11:00 A.M.** in-person or through an advocate/pleader to answer the questions to the same, failing which the suit will be heard and determined as ex-parte.

Given under my hand and seal this 25th day of March 2026 at Bengaluru.

By Order of the Court
Sd/- Senior Sheristedar
City Civil Court, Bangalore

ADVOCATE FOR PLAINTIFF
A M IKTEAR UDDIN, ADVOCATE,
Prime Legal,
No.39/2, 2nd Floor, ASVN Sangha Building, K.G. Road, Bangalore - 560009
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PERSONAL

CHANGE OF NAME

I, GEORGE Vargis, s/o Vargis Puttanvid Kuriyacost, Residing at No.30, Ashirvad St Marks Road,Blr–56001, have changed my name to George. Vide affidavit date:18.3.2026

I, Purushotham Nayaka D S alias Vishal Purushotham Nayaka D S, aged 39 years, S/o H. Shree Ramaiah, residing at Yelahanka, Bangalore–560064, hereby declare that both names refer to one and the same person, and my legal name shall continue to be Purushotham Nayaka D S.

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Secretive jungle cats need habitats outside protected areas: study

A new study's finding that jungle cats use agricultural landscapes aligns with previous knowledge of the species, in and around farms, these cats keep rodent populations in check, thus 'protecting' crops; however, these landscapes lie outside protected areas and harbour several threats, including fragmented habitats and speeding vehicles

Ananya Singh

A jungle cat in Rajasthan, 2021. KANDUKURU NAGARJUN

THE GIST

- Despite being the most widespread of India's small cats, jungle cats are understudied and have received little conservation attention relative to larger carnivores
- According to a new study, the estimated countrywide population of jungle cats is over 3 lakh
- Jungle cats avoids dense forests and heavily-modified landscapes, preferring agro-pastoral and open habitats

Jungle cats (*Felis chaus*) are found across diverse habitats, from grasslands and wetlands to deserts. They are present across Asia, with large populations in India and Nepal, among others. The IUCN Red List lists the species as being of 'least concern'.

This has led to a "misconception that they are doing fine", Kathan Bandyopadhyay, a postdoctoral research associate at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, said.

Jungle cats' populations are in fact considered to be shrinking. In India, they are protected under Schedule II of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972, which means hunting or trading them is illegal.

Despite being the most widespread of India's small cats, jungle cats are understudied and have received little conservation attention relative to larger carnivores such as tigers and leopards.

Conservation baseline

This animal – with a white muzzle, yellow irises, large ears ending in black tufts, and the sometimes faint striping on its long legs – avoids dense forests and heavily-modified landscapes, preferring agro-pastoral and open habitats, according to a new study based on the largest dataset on the species in India.

The study was published in *Scientific Reports*, and provides a baseline for future conservation planning.

"Until now, we didn't know about their population status or how they are responding to several habitat and climatic covariates," Dr. Bandyopadhyay, who undertook this research as a PhD student at the University of Wyoming, said.

The team found human pressure to be the foremost factor influencing where jungle cats live and that while they can tolerate moderate levels of human disturbance, they avoid densely populated areas.

"Our results highlight the importance of agro-pastoral landscapes in conserving wildlife beyond protected areas, especially as urbanisation continues to expand," Dr. Bandyopadhyay said.

'An important analysis'

To estimate how many jungle cats were in India and where, the team compiled camera-trap records from more than 26,000 locations across India. These records were a 'bycatch' of tiger surveys and were supplemented with data from previous studies, radio-collared individuals, and the authors' personal observations. The researchers then included one camera-trap record every 25 sq. km, one radio-collar data point from every 5 sq. km, plus all secondary data (from outside protected areas). Then they used machine-learning to model suitable habitats using the final dataset of over 6,000 records.

The team combined these results with sex-specific home range data to estimate a countrywide population of over 3 lakh jungle cats, with at least 1.57 lakh and at most 4.59 lakh individuals. "It's an estimate. It gives you a limit within which the cat is likely to be," Yadvendradev Jhala, senior scientist at the National Centre for Biological Sciences and the study's co-author and co-supervisor, said.

Across 21 States with suitable habitats, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Odisha were estimated to support the largest populations.

The study is an "important analysis" and has "strengthened the observation that the jungle cat is tightly associated with open natural ecosystems, currently under enormous threat of conversion to other forms of land use, such as built-up areas and large-scale linear infrastructure like highways," Shomita Mukherjee, senior principal scientist at the Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History, Coimbatore, and a member of the IUCN/SSC Cat Specialists Group, said. Dr. Mukherjee was not a part of the study.

Ideal landscapes

Per the study, jungle cats prefer warm, semi-arid regions that are seasonally dry, with moderate rainfall and canopy cover. Their predicted hotspots lie in India's east rather than in the drier west.

> Our results highlight the importance of agro-pastoral landscapes in conserving wildlife beyond protected areas, especially as urbanisation continues to expand
>
> **KATHAN BANDYOPADHYAY**
> Postdoctoral research associate at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

India needs land policies that recognise the ecological value of open ecosystems, Dr. Mukherjee added.

According to her, the finding that jungle cats use agricultural landscapes aligns with previous knowledge of the species. In and around farms, these cats keep rodent populations in check, thus 'protecting' crops.

However, these landscapes lie outside protected areas and harbour several threats, including fragmented habitats, speeding vehicles on roads, and poaching, according to the study.

It also pointed to a potential threat from hybridisation with domestic cats, which could compromise their genetic lineage, although Dr. Bandyopadhyay and Dr. Mukherjee cautioned that this idea doesn't have enough evidence.

Another key threat is the stray dog population, which "acts as a source of wildlife diseases and kleptoparasitism – that means snatching kills from jungle cats and other carnivores," Dr. Bandyopadhyay said.

Per the study, stray dogs could share foraging spaces with other livestock, so where there is livestock, there could be the risk of these canines as well.

A policy for small cats

According to Dr. Mukherjee, the study's strengths lie in its large spatial coverage and sample size, although she added that jungle cats from Sikkim had been left out and that the population figures were based on a "meagre dataset of a few radio-collared individuals in just a couple of locations".

"Yet this should not be seen as a limitation but an effort to get the best out of data currently available," she added.

Dr. Bandyopadhyay said the records from Sikkim were sporadic and insufficiently viable for the models.

Scientists still have a great number of unknowns, including jungle cats' denning sites, litter sizes, ranging patterns, densities, and diets.

Small cats are generally hard to study because they are nocturnal and secretive. Public awareness is also low, and few organisations have been willing to fund more study.

Going forward, Dr. Jhala said, there is a need to plan wildlife passageways alongside infrastructure development in agro-pastoral and open habitats. "When roads pass through a tiger or elephant corridor, there is a policy to try and mitigate those. But when they pass through agro-pastoral landscapes, we don't plan for it even though these areas support rich biodiversity," he said.

(Ananya Singh is an independent journalist. ananyaasingh.as@gmail.com)

BIG SHOT

A handout picture taken in 2023 off Dominique Island shows female sperm whales holding a newborn calf above water until it can swim on its own. Last week, U.S.-based Project CETI researchers reported they had witnessed the rare spectacle of a wild sperm whale being born, immediately carried to the surface by members of its clan. AFP

WHAT IS IT?

exRNA: on a mission

Vasudevan Mukunth

In a study published in the journal *Clean Water* on March 28, scientists reported that extracellular RNA (exRNA) from bacteria can persist in disinfected drinking water. They also found that by studying the exRNA, they could figure out what the bacteria were doing just before they were damaged or killed, releasing the exRNA. This way, the scientists could figure out which survival strategies worked for the bacteria — which can be used to make better disinfectants.

exRNA is RNA that exists outside cells, in body fluids such as blood, saliva, urine, and cerebrospinal fluid. For decades, scientists believed RNA only functioned inside the cell and assumed that if RNA 'leaked' out, enzymes in the blood would destroy it. However, researchers have found that cells in fact intentionally 'export' RNA.

To survive outside the cell, exRNA travels in its own molecular containers that prevent enzymes from breaking it down before it reaches its destination.

exRNA has been found to be part of a sophisticated long-distance communication system. A cell releases RNA to deliver instructions to another cell elsewhere in the body, changing how it behaves or which genes it activates. This process helps coordinate responses in the immune system, tissue repair, and development. However, cancer cells can also release exRNA to promote tumour growth.

An illustration of the RNA called mRNA. GETTY IMAGES

The discovery of exRNA changed modern medicine. For instance, just by testing a patient's blood or other body fluids, doctors can identify specific RNA patterns linked to cancer or heart disease.

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for 'Science', please write to **science@thehindu.co.in** with the subject 'Daily page'

LPG crunch revives firewood economy

The surge in demand for firewood, owing to LPG supply constraints, has given rise to an informal firewood market

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

Alternative means: In Shivamogga, many hotels have been forced to abandon LPG-based cooking owing to the non-availability of commercial cylinders. S.K. DINESH

The demand for firewood has seen a sharp rise across several rural and semi-urban parts of Karnataka in recent weeks, as disruptions in the supply of Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) has pushed households and businesses back to traditional cooking fuels. The surge, triggered by supply constraints linked to the ongoing West Asia crisis, has also given rise to a parallel, largely informal, firewood market in many districts.

In Kodagu district, residents in small towns are increasingly turning to firewood, prompting estate owners and rural households to begin selling wood, a practice that was uncommon until recently. The trade has even moved online, with sellers using WhatsApp groups to connect directly with buyers.

Prithvi Bopanna, a resident of Gonikoppa in south Kodagu, said the demand has grown rapidly from both households and commercial establishments. "We are selling firewood from our estates, and also sourcing from other estates to meet the demand. Hotels and homes are both purchasing," he said.

According to him, a pickup jeep load of firewood is currently priced between ₹5,000 and ₹7,000, depending on quality and quantity.

A similar trend is visible in Shivamogga, where many hotels have been forced to abandon LPG-based cooking due to the non-availability of commercial cylinders. Several establishments have reverted to traditional firewood stoves, with piles of wood now a common sight.

A cashier at Meenakshi Bhavan, a hotel in Shivamogga, said the shift was unavoidable. "We had to switch to firewood cooking as LPG cylinders were not available. However, even firewood costs have increased, and we are sourcing and storing stock from private farms to ensure continuity," he said.

In Mysuru, the impact of the LPG shortage has driven both households and the hospitality sector to rely on firewood, leading to a spike in prices and demand.

Arif, who runs a timber depot on Benki Nawab Street in Mysuru, said his daily sales have more than doubled. "Earlier, I would sell around 500 kg of firewood a day, mostly to caterers. Now, I am selling more than double that quantity, with households and hotels becoming regular customers," he said.

He added that prices have increased from ₹60-₹70 for 10 kg to ₹80-₹100, reflecting both higher demand and limited supply. Timber merchants in nearby Hunsur, from whom he sources wood, are struggling to keep up with the rising requirement.

Mysuru Hotel Owners' Association president Narayan Gowda said that the situation has left hotel owners with limited choices. "With the suspension of commercial LPG supply, many are either forced to shut down or switch to firewood. Paying ₹6,000-₹7,000 for a LPG cylinder in the black market is not viable," he said.

The situation in the rural hinterlands appears different as firewood is already the primary cooking fuel. Woodcutting industries in the Yadgir district, in the Kalyana Karnataka region, have reported a modest increase in demand, estimated at 10-15% above normal levels. Traders in Yadgir said firewood is being sold at around ₹70 per kilogram and ₹700 per quintal, with meaningful supply constraints so far.

Mysuru shelter turns to firewood to feed animals

The Hindu Bureau
MYSURU

People For Animals (PFA) Mysuru has adapted its operations to ensure uninterrupted care for hundreds of animals despite the shortage of commercial gas cylinders.

Anil, manager of PFA Mysuru, said the shelter transitioned to using firewood for cooking. "While the shortage affected our routine, we quickly shifted to firewood. It has proven to be faster and more efficient for large-scale cooking," he said.

To sustain operations, PFA Mysuru has procured around 1.5 tonnes of firewood.

Forest Department halts firewood auctions

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

Amid a shortage of liquefied petroleum gas supply in Karnataka, the State Forest Department has decided to temporarily halt the auction of firewood to curb hoarding and ensure availability for essential use.

In a circular issued on March 18, the department instructed divisional-level officials to suspend the ongoing and upcoming firewood auctions, citing the likelihood of increased demand for alternative fuel sources in the coming weeks.

An exception has been made for domestic consumers, allowing limited access to firewood. At the same time, officials have been asked to prioritise anganwadis and hostels.

Cab driver accused of insulting Kannada

BENGALURU: Anchor and Janapada singer Divya Alur recently filed a complaint at the Girinagar police station against a cab driver for allegedly insulting the Kannada language. According to the complaint, the accused driver allegedly made derogatory remarks about the Kannada language and questioned its relevance in Bengaluru.

Ms. Divya urged the police to take strict legal action against the driver.

Further investigation is under way.

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Text&Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Death toll due to extreme weather in Afghanistan

17 Severe flooding, a landslide and thunderstorms in parts of Afghanistan have left 17 people dead and 26 injured over the last 24 hours, authorities said on Sunday, the latest casualties from extreme weather in the country this season. AP

Artificial water harvesting structures in India in 11 years

50 in lakh. Nearly 50 lakh artificial water harvesting structures have been created under the '*Jal Sanchay Abhiyan*' and 70,000 lakes were made under the '*Amrit Sarovar Abhiyan*' in the last 11 years, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Sunday. PTI

Worth of deals secured by Ethiopia at investment conference

13 in $ billion. Ethiopia has secured $13 billion worth of investment deals, the state investment commission said. Like other frontier economies in Africa, the East African nation has been seeking to boost foreign direct investment. REUTERS

Maoists surrendered before Odisha Police since January 2025

77 Odisha DGP Y.B. Khurania on Sunday said 77 Maoists have surrendered before police in the State between January 2025 and March this year. He also said 27 Maoists have been killed in exchanges of fire with security forces since January 2025. PTI

Stolen mobile phones recovered by Delhi Police

100 The Delhi Police said on Sunday that the Crime Branch has traced and returned over 100 lost or stolen mobile phones to their rightful owners in a coordinated drive. PTI

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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On Maharashtra's anti-conversion Bill

How does the 60-day notice requirement work? Who can file a complaint under the law? What penalties does the Bill prescribe for violations? When can a marriage be declared null and void? Why have civil rights groups raised concerns? How has the State justified the need for the law?

EXPLAINER

Vinaya Deshpande Pandit

The story so far:
The Maharashtra Freedom of Religion Bill, 2026, was passed by both Houses of the Maharashtra Legislature a few days ago. The Bill has been opposed by several civil society organisations, which have expressed apprehensions about the State encroaching on the personal liberty of its citizens. They claim that the Bill violates the fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution.

What is the Maharashtra Freedom of Religion Bill?
The Maharashtra Freedom of Religion Bill, 2026, has been defined as "a Bill to provide for protection of right to freedom of religion and prohibition of unlawful conversion from one religion to another, and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto." It aims to prohibit conversions carried out through allurement, misrepresentation, force, undue influence, coercion, or any other fraudulent means.

It lays down an elaborate procedure for conversion, including a declaration of intent with a 60-day prior notice. A post-conversion declaration is also required.

What are the key provisions?
Under the proposed Act, it is mandatory for the police officer to register a complaint even if the relatives of the converted person approach them. The complainant may be the converted person, or their parents, siblings, or any other person related by blood, marriage, or adoption.

Any marriage solemnised solely for unlawful conversion shall be declared null and void by the court, on a petition filed by either party. Any child born out of such a marriage or relationship belongs to the religion of the mother before such a marriage or relationship. The child will have succession rights to the property of both parents as per the prevailing laws. Maintenance will have to be given, and custody will remain with the mother unless decided otherwise by a court.

Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis says conversions causing disturbance to public order in the State. PTI

What punishment is proposed under the Bill?
Punishments for violation include imprisonment of up to 10 years and a fine of up to ₹7 lakh. Offences under the Bill will be cognisable and non-bailable.

The offence of unlawful conversion is punishable with up to seven years' imprisonment and a fine of ₹1 lakh. If the person converted is a minor, a woman, a person of unsound mind, or belongs to the Scheduled Castes or the Scheduled Tribes, the punishment increases to seven years' imprisonment and a fine of ₹5 lakh.

Mass conversions will attract similar penalties. Repeat offenders may face imprisonment of up to 10 years and a fine of ₹7 lakh. Institutions found guilty of forced conversions may face cancellation of registration and withdrawal of government aid or grants. Office-bearers may also face imprisonment of up to seven years and a fine of ₹5 lakh. Victims will be entitled to rehabilitation, maintenance, and custody of children.

What are the concerns raised?
Concerns have been raised on several grounds, including the lack of empirical evidence to justify such legislation, the social implications of the 60-day prior notice requirement, the curtailment of the individual's right to freedom of religion, and administrative overreach into personal matters.

Last year, the State government appointed a seven-member special committee under the Director General of Police to study legal issues related to religious conversion. Its report has not yet been made public, though the government has said that the committee recommended enacting a special law.

Opposition leaders have termed the Bill 'regressive' and alleged that it targets a particular community.

Since offences under the Bill are non-bailable, civil rights activists have expressed concerns that it may target interfaith marriages and minority religious practices. They also fear the intervention of families and vigilante groups in pressuring consenting adult couples.

"In any case, this places State surveillance over deeply personal decisions related to faith and marriage," a civil rights activist said.

Bureaucrats have also raised administrative concerns. "There is no established certification system for religions right now. We will have to develop a system. This is an administrative concern. We will have to look into the models that other States have developed. An entire gamut of administrative mechanisms will have to be created," a senior IAS officer said, adding that the revenue authorities will now come into the picture for matters of marriage and personal laws, which were managed by the civil courts so far. "Personal law is increasingly becoming a matter of administrative authorities. This creates a complication for marriages out of free will, too," an IAS officer said.

How has the State government addressed these apprehensions?
The government has said that the right to freedom of religion is not absolute. It has also been said that the cases of forcible religious conversions have been increasing in the State, and that the government does not currently have effective laws to tackle the law and order issues arising out of them.

"These instances are causing disturbance to public order in the State and are affecting social harmony," Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis has said.

THE GIST

- The Maharashtra Freedom of Religion Bill, 2026, seeks to prohibit unlawful religious conversions and mandates procedures such as a 60-day prior notice and post-conversion declaration, with violations attracting imprisonment, fines, and non-bailable offences.
- The Bill has drawn criticism from civil society and Opposition leaders, who argue it curtails personal liberty, enables State interference in faith and marriage, and may target interfaith relationships, while the government defends it as necessary to address forcible conversions and maintain public order.

Pak. as U.S. mediator with Iran recalls Nixon's China outreach

Washington's decision is shaped by Pakistan's proximity, its ties with Tehran, and its lack of ties with Israel

WORLD INSIGHT

Suhasini Haidar

Pakistan's emergence as Washington's choice as a mediator in talks with Iran can be explained in a number of ways. Since Operation Sindoor in May 2025, U.S. President Donald Trump has been flattered by Pakistan's description of him as a "peacemaker", and he has reportedly built a personal rapport with Pakistan's Field Marshal General Asim Munir and Pakistani PM Shehbaz Sharif, meeting them several times.

In particular, Mr. Trump hosted General Munir to lunch at the White House in June last year, amidst the last U.S.-Israeli strikes, in an effort reportedly to ensure that Pakistan would not support Iran militarily.

Pakistan's offer of a critical minerals deal to the U.S. and decision to join the Gaza Board of Peace (BoP) have also helped forge the relationship.

For Iran, Pakistan's advantage over many other possible mediators is not only its proximity but also the fact that it does not recognise Israel, and thus is not amenable to concerns or inputs from the Benjamin Netanyahu government. This may suit Mr. Trump as well, who has reportedly conveyed a 15-point proposal to the government in Tehran, which it hopes will lead to a ceasefire.

Cold War precedent
However, Washington's decision to engage Pakistan as a facilitator for talks may also be rooted in history, given Islamabad and a different General's role in facilitating U.S. talks with China 55 years ago, at the height of the Cold War.

At that time, U.S. President Richard Nixon had begun to work on his plan to open up relations with Beijing (the U.S. still formally recognised Taiwan as the Republic of China), but direct Sino-U.S. Ambassadorial talks had floundered. Pakistan was not the first option, as he and his National Security Advisor, Henry Kissinger, considered others.

Mao Zedong, Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party and leader of the People's Republic of China (PRC), turned down the idea of France as he wanted a "non-Western" channel. The Warsaw track fell apart after two rounds of talks between U.S. and Chinese officials, as Mr. Mao protested U.S. attacks on Cambodia, which were part of a U.S. Army effort to cut off supplies to Vietnamese troops.

While Mr. Nixon's need for partners in Asia, as the Vietnam War drained the U.S., drove him to seek China, Sino-Soviet tensions gave Mr. Mao a reason to engage with Washington.

The U.S. tried Romania, working through President Nicolae Ceausescu to reach out to the Chinese government, but hit an unexpected block. "We went to the Romanians, thinking they were most independent of the East Europeans and they were communists and therefore the Chinese would like that. Turns out the one group the Chinese didn't trust were Communists," Mr. Kissinger told journalist Tom Brokaw decades later, explaining that Beijing feared Romanian officials would divulge details to the Kremlin, which would attempt to sabotage the process.

By then, Mr. Nixon had also established a secret channel to the PRC's leadership through Pakistani President General Agha Mohammad Yahya Khan. "In Nixon's view, Khan was an attractive intermediary since he had good relations with the leaders of the U.S. and the PRC, and he provided a means to circumvent the U.S. Department of State, which Nixon feared might oppose or publicise his initiative," records the U.S. Office of the Historian, in a note about the China opening.

According to one account, the White House sent two identical notes, one through President Yahya Khan and another through President Ceausescu, but it was Pakistan's Ambassador to Washington, Agha Hilaly, who returned with a response first, a whole month before his Romanian counterpart did. In July 1971, Mr. Kissinger travelled to Pakistan, where he feigned an illness and was taken to Nathiagali (near Murree), away from the eyes of the press corps and even his own diplomats in Islamabad. Gen. Khan had arranged for a commercial PIA flight 707 to take him from Rawalpindi to Peking (Beijing) for talks.

Mr. Kissinger, who had been hosted by Indian officials a day before, reportedly used "Delhi belly" as his excuse to ensure a 64-hour getaway that included meeting Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai and others in China for the first time. Planning for Mr. Nixon's visit to China in February 1972, which he referred to as the 'week that changed the world', had begun.

Cost of back-channel diplomacy
The event had deep and lasting impacts on South Asia as well. Mr. Nixon's preoccupation with his back-channel to China and deep-seated rancour against India led him to turn a blind eye as Pakistan's troops unleashed a genocide on Bengalis in East Pakistan. On March 25, 1971, the Pakistan Army launched Operation Searchlight, killing an estimated three million over the next nine months, according to the Bangladesh government.

On April 28, 1971, Mr. Kissinger sent a memo to Mr. Nixon detailing options before the U.S.: (1) support Pakistan militarily; (2) maintain neutrality; (3) help "Yahya achieve a negotiated settlement".

Mr. Nixon's instructions, despite desperate telegrams from the U.S. Embassy in Dhaka about the violence, were clear. "To all hands, don't squeeze Yahya at this time," he wrote, checking option (3).

The crackdown led lakhs of refugees to flee to India, spurring India's support to the Muktibahini movement led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who had won Pakistani General elections in December 1970 but was imprisoned. The India-Pakistan war followed, where the U.S. even attempted to threaten India by dispatching a naval fleet, but ultimately, Bangladesh was formed by December that year. India's perspective was shaped by the 20-year Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation signed in August 1971.

Pakistan has played the role several times. External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar reminded opposition MPs at an all-party meeting last week, when they criticised the government's failure to play a bigger role in the crisis. Since 1981, Pakistan has represented Tehran through its Embassy in Washington's "Iran Interests Section". During the two-decade-long U.S. military intervention in Afghanistan, Pakistan also acted as a mediator with the Taliban. Islamabad was the venue for Quadrilateral talks between Egypt-Pakistan-Turkiye-Saudi Foreign Ministers on Sunday, and could host a U.S. delegation this week. Much depends on whether the Iranian leadership, which accused the U.S. of planning a ground invasion, will join the talks.

Different stories emerging from Bagalkot battleground

While senior Congress leaders are campaigning for Umesh Hullappa Meti, the party nominee, it seems Veeranna Charantimath, the BJP candidate, has largely been left to fend for himself

Rishikesh Bahadur Desai
BELAGAVI

Veeranna Charantimath, BJP candidate for the Bagalkot Assembly bypolls, campaigning in Bagalkot on Saturday. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Minister for Large and Medium Industries M.B. Patil campaigning for Congress candidate Umesh Hullappa Meti in Bagalkot on Saturday. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

As the bypoll fever rises along with the ambient temperature in Bagalkot, different stories seem to emerge from the camps of the BJP and the Congress. While a batch of senior Congress leaders are busy campaigning for Umesh Hullappa Meti, the party nominee, it seems that Veeranna Charantimath, the BJP candidate, is isolated and largely left to fend for himself.

The image of Mr. Charantimath as a short-tempered leader as against that of Mr. Umesh Meti who is seen as soft spoken and approachable, seems to have focused the campaign on individuals rather than parties.

Mr. Charantimath's primary political opponent is his younger brother Mallikarjun Charantimath, a Congress leader. Mr. Mallikarjun Charantimath had fought the 2023 elections as an Independent and gained over 10,000 votes. Hullappa Yamanappa Meti of the Congress won that election with a margin of around 5,800 votes. A few months later, Mr. Mallikarjun Charantimath joined the Congress.

After the bypolls were announced, there were rumours on social media that he was planning to join the BJP. But he countered them. He said that several BJP leaders, from Bagalkot and Bengaluru, had contacted him and asked him to join the BJP.

"No BJP leader has met me till now. They do not have the moral courage to meet me. They are only making phone calls and inviting me to join the BJP. My question to them is regarding the time of their invitation," he told reporters in Bagalkot recently. He was present when Mr. Umesh Meti filed his nominations and has been active in the Congress campaign.

Other senior BJP leaders with local influence like Murugesh Nirani, former Minister, and Basavaraj Katageri, former chairman of the Bagalkot City Municipal Council, are yet to join Mr. Charantimath's campaign. Some leaders like P.H. Pujar, former MLA, and Hanumant Nirani, MLC, are seen in public rallies. They are also campaigning in parts of the city, but they are not seen along with the party nominee.

When reporters asked Mr. Charantimath about the absence of some leaders in his campaign, he said he would not invite anyone to support him. "Only those who are genuinely interested in the party's victory will join the campaign without asking," he said.

"Mr. Charantimath has served as our MLA three times in the past. But he failed to take everyone along. He focused on a few of his loyalists, his education society, and his cooperative society. This alienated him further," said a senior BJP leader, who has served as a zilla panchayat member.

Mr. Charantimath's long standing friendship with expelled BJP leader Basanagouda R. Patil Yatnal is no secret. On the day the BJP announced its nominees, Mr. Yatnal said he would camp in Bagalkot for a week and campaign for his friend. Not everyone in the BJP camp believes that Mr. Yatnal's presence will help the party. They feel it would damage the campaign and embarrass the party, as Mr. Yatnal is known to insult and ridicule party State president B.Y. Vijayendra and his father B.S. Yediyurappa.

As if on cue, Mr. Charantimath responded to queries by reporters, saying he had not invited Mr. Yatnal, but he had heard him volunteer to campaign for him.

CORRIDORS OF POWER

Polls: Secretariat on pause

The administrative machinery in the State Secretariat (Vidhana Soudha) is likely to come to a halt over the next 10 days, as Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and his Cabinet colleagues shift into full campaign mode for byelections in two constituencies in Karnataka and Assembly elections in neighbouring States.

The Chief Minister is expected to launch the party's campaign in Bagalkot and Davangere South constituencies on Monday. Meanwhile, Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar, who is in charge of Assam, has already reached the State. Ministers such as B.Z. Zameer Ahmed Khan, Eshwar Khandre, and Krishna Byre Gowda are campaigning in Kerala, while Dinesh Gundu Rao and a few others are expected to head to Tamil Nadu. Some Ministers are also likely to oversee campaign efforts in the two constituencies within the State.

Personal connect with Bill

The debate on the Karnataka Freedom of Choice in Marriage and Prevention and Prohibition of Crimes in the Name of Honour and Tradition Bill, 2026, (popularly referred to as Eva Nammava, Eva Nammava Bill) in the Legislative Council provided stage for members to share their personal experiences, in the recently concluded Budget Session.

Leader of the Opposition Chalavadi Narayanaswamy *(pictured)* said he had never been allowed to enter a temple in his native place owing to caste discrimination. In his college days he was turned away from a barber shop after his caste identity became known. "Since then, I have been cutting my own hair," he said.

BJP member C.T. Ravi narrated how he had attempted to change the rigid views his mother once held on caste discrimination, reflecting on gradual shifts within families.

Replying to the debate, Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister H.K. Patil said the Bill marked the beginning of a broader social dialogue. "This is not about immediate social change, but about initiating a conversation," he said.

Adjustment politics again

The BJP has come under scrutiny for what critics describe as "adjustment politics" after fielding a Scheduled Tribes candidate Srinivas Dasakariyappa in Davangere South, a general constituency.

The party's decision to nominate Mr. Dasakariyappa, a leader from the Valmiki Nayaka community, has surprised many. The issue gained prominence after expelled BJP leader and MLA Basanagouda R. Patil Yatnal accused State BJP president B.Y. Vijayendra of entering into an internal adjustment with the Shamanur Shivashankarappa family.

Mr. Yatnal alleged that Mr. Vijayendra deliberately fielded a ST candidate in a general seat to facilitate an easy victory for Samarth Shamanur in the April 9 byelection. He attributed this move to the close ties between the late Shivashankarappa and former Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa.

However, former Minister B. Sriramulu rejected this claim, stating that the decision was intended to provide an opportunity to a loyal party worker from a deprived background rather than to benefit any particular family.

Nagesh Prabhu
Afshan Yasmeen
Rishikesh Bahadur Desai

Probe ordered after deceased appears in records

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

The Karnataka Information Commission has ordered high-level inquiries into three separate land dispute cases across Mysuru, Mandya, and Bengaluru Urban districts, with one case in Mysuru drawing particular attention after records allegedly showed a deceased person attending official hearings.

State Information Commissioner Rudranna Hartikote, while hearing appeals filed by three applicants, directed the Deputy Commissioners of the districts concerned and the Additional Chief Secretary of the Revenue Department to constitute inquiry committees headed by the Additional Deputy Commissioners.

The most striking case emerged from Mysuru, where S. Ravi, a resident of Kyathamaranahalli, alleged serious irregularities in records related to Survey No. 155.

Mr. Ravi claimed that although his father, Shivachikkayya, had passed away, official documents showed him attending hearings at the taluk office on June 13, 2023, and July 11, 2023, and even signing documents.

Seeking proof, Mr. Ravi filed a Right to Information (RTI) application requesting certified records along with CCTV camera footage. However, the taluk office failed to provide the requested information.

The commission observed that such discrepancies could amount to a criminal offence. It directed that an inquiry be conducted. If wrongdoing is established, officials responsible must face criminal proceedings, and the applicant must be duly informed.

In another case from Mandya district, K.S. Parthasarathi of Kottahalli village in Maddur taluk sought records related to Survey Nos. 53/50 and 53/51, allegedly linked to land alienation in favour of an educational institution. Initially, authorities claimed the file was missing.

However, during the hearing, officials stated that the file was actually available in the Sub-Divisional Officer's office and pertained to Malavalli taluk. The commission has now ordered the verification of the file's authenticity and directed that disciplinary action be initiated if irregularities are found.

A similar concern arose in Bengaluru East taluk, where Govindaraju, a resident of Mitaganahalli village, sought records related to Survey No. 2. Officials termed the file "suspicious," prompting the commission to order a detailed inquiry into the matter as well.

Mann Ki Baat: Modi hails Bengaluru-based educational institute for popularising science education

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU/BELAGAVI

Fish farmers Raju Shivalingappa Huddar and Shivalingappa Satappa Huddar of Belagavi district whose success story was mentioned by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. P.K. BADIGER

Prime Minister Narendra Modi made a reference to Bengaluru-based Prayoga Institute of Education Research and a Belagavi-based fish farmer during his Mann Ki Baat address on Sunday.

Mr. Modi spoke about Prayoga's efforts in popularising science education at the school level and its education research project Anveshana.

"I have come to know about an unique initiative related to education in Bengaluru. A team here is running Prayoga Institute of Education Research. This team has a special focus on research projects. This team is engaged in popularising science education at the school level. They have launched an experiment called Anveshana, which provides students from classes 9 to 12 the opportunity to innovate in areas like chemistry, earth science, and wellness," Mr Modi said.

He added that this initiative provides students with a very good research experience and a platform to publish their projects.

"Friends, during our Pareeksha Pe Charcha, some students told me that they wanted to study science but were also intimidated by it. The efforts of the Prayoga team in this direction are commendable. This initiative gives students the opportunity to engage with science and demonstrate practical experience. When we try something firsthand, curiosity and interest are generated. Who knows, perhaps one of these young friends of mine might be a great scientist of the future," he added.

Fish farmers

Young Raju Shivalingappa Huddar and his father Shivalingappa Satappa Huddar of Bodkyanatti village in Belagavi district have achieved significant success in inland farming.

Residents of Bodkyanatti village were happy to listen to Mr. Modi mention the success story of Mr. Raju during Mann Ki Baat.

Mr. Raju and his father have been farming fish since 2024. With an initial investment of ₹30 lakh, they are earning around ₹20 lakh every 10 months.

'Translations of historical works into local languages key to counter misinformation'

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

Translations of historical works into regional languages are crucial to counter misinformation on its own turf. While translations speak in the language of the people, propaganda, too, spreads most effectively in the language people consume daily, making it important that well-researched history is available in those very languages to challenge it, historian Ruchika Sharma said.

Prof. Sharma was speaking at the release of *'Karavaliya Charitreyalli Hyder Ali Mattu Tippu Sultan'* (Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan in the History of Coastal Karnataka) by author and journalist Naveen Soorinje. IT/BT Minister Priyank Kharge, among others, was also present.

"One of the key reasons for the growing communalisation of history is that good academic history is still in the shackles of English," said Prof. Sharma, adding that freeing such work into languages like Kannada is essential to push back against distortions. Writing history in a language that people understand, she said, is a powerful way to counter "factless gibberish masquerading as history," circulated through social media and messaging platforms.

Turning to Tipu Sultan, Prof. Sharma highlighted some of the persistent claims around his rule, particularly on forced conversions. She said historical sources offer multiple, complex, and conflicting narratives on his rule.

Speaking at the event, Mr. Kharge said there is a growing trend of reshaping history to suit political narratives. Referring to Prof. Sharma's point on misinformation circulating in WhatsApp groups, he said this has now expanded into mainstream platforms like cinema.

"Earlier it was one forward in a resident welfare group. Now it is amplified through films and large-scale productions," he said, citing *Dhurandhar 2*, *The Kerala Story*, and *The Kashmir Files*, among other recent movies based on historical themes.

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Tender No.: RWF/M/OT/AMS/2025-26/98RT3 **Dtd:** 28.03.2026. **Name of the Work:** Outsourcing the machining (Rough turning / Semi Finishing) of 27557 numbers of LHB Axles at firm's premises. **Estimated Cost:** Rs. 30,40,36,381/-. **EMD:** Rs. 16,70,200/-. **Completion Period:** 15 Months. **Date of Closing of Tenders:** 20.04.2026 at 10:30 Hrs.

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Tender Notice No. RWF/M/OT/AMS/2025-26/99RT3 Dated 28.03.2026

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Tender No.: RWF/M/OT/AMS/2025-26/99RT3 **Dtd:** 28.03.2026. **Name of the Work:** Outsourcing the machining (Rough turning / Semi Finishing) of 8712 numbers of WAG-9 Axles at firm's premises. **Estimated Cost:** Rs. 6,66,11,952/-. **EMD:** Rs. 4,83,100/-. **Completion Period:** 15 Months. **Date of Closing of Tenders:** 20.04.2026 at 10:30 Hrs.

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OBITUARY & REMEMBRANCE

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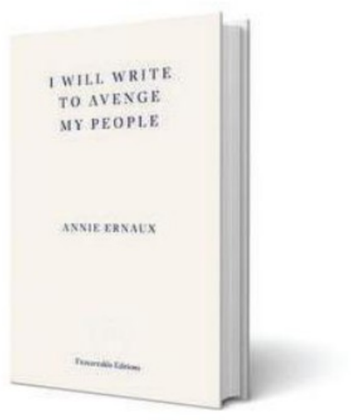
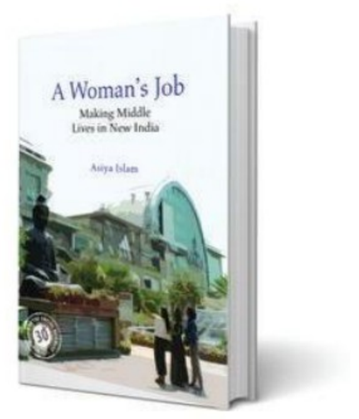
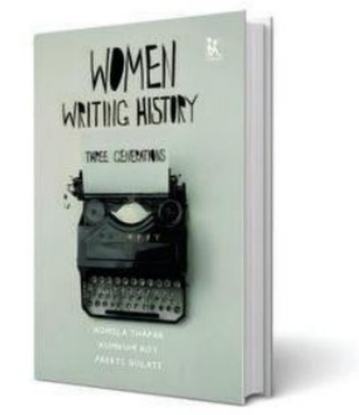
GETTY IMAGES







From memory to archive, women's writing creates new ways to narrate the past

Using literature, memoir, and ethnography, women's stories challenge male-dominated narratives; they reclaim history by turning personal memory into a powerful record of lived experience and structural inequality

Uma Mahadevan-Dasgupta

Over the years, women's writing has engaged in both creative expression and historical excavation. Probing the gaps and omissions in traditional historiography, it has produced new ways to narrate, archive, and comprehend individual and collective life. Weaving strands from history, literature, ethnography, and memoir, it unsettles the boundaries between the subjective and the analytical and challenges conventions long shaped by institutional archives and male-dominated narratives by bringing in lived experience, especially that of women.

In her Nobel Lecture, delivered in 2022, Annie Ernaux articulates this project with powerful clarity: "*I will write to avenge my people*." For Ernaux, writing is an instrument with which to strip off surface layers and reveal deeper truths about gender, class, and time. Reading Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, she came to recognise that the world was made "by men and for men." Searingly personal experiences – a backstreet abortion, her father's death, her mother's Alzheimer's, and the relentless weight of class – are crafted into narratives that go far beyond the individual. "All these factors," she writes, "brought me back...to my 'people', and gave my desire to write a quality of secret and absolute urgency."

Ernaux is sharply aware of the limits of writing as a corrective to injustice. Personal accomplishment cannot erase centuries of oppression and humiliation, of being "the last in a line of landless labourers, factory workers and shopkeepers, people despised for their manners, their accent, their lack of education." Nevertheless, she can still bear witness. Going beyond memoir, her writing becomes a form of historical witnessing in which memory operates as an archive of loss and longing. Literature is her "continent," and her mission is "nothing less than the possibility of transfiguring reality."

Documenting individual histories

Contemporary ethnographic work similarly documents individual histories in everyday lived experience. Asiya Islam's *A Woman's Job: Making Middle Lives in New India* follows the lives of young lower-middle-class women through education and employment in cafes and call centres in globalising Delhi. At the crossroads of modern aspirations and traditional constraints, these young, educated, urban women move in an unstable middle space circumscribed by expectations about caste, class, gender, and sexuality.

Sheela, a café barista, has studied up to Class 12 but could not go further due to a lack of money. Her mother is a domestic worker in multiple homes; her father is unemployed. Knowing a few standard English phrases – "Good morning, sir/ma'am"; "What can I get for you?"; "Have in or take away?" – she is aware of her lack of options: "I'll continue here because I'm unable to get out of it. If I leave this, I'll have to sit at home."

Jahnavi's parents are *presswallahs*, like her grandparents. She gets paid ₹9,000 per month but tells her family she gets less, saving the rest. Fired from her first job for "not talking nicely" to a male manager, she now works at a specialty tea café.

Ranjini juggles a 10-hour shift in a fast food chain, a distance BCom, and housework; she also wakes up early to prepare for Delhi Police selections.

In these narratives of young women in new India, ethnography makes visible what is overlooked by dominant narratives. These stories, while intensely personal, also point to the structural.

Studying and writing history

The question of who writes and interprets such histories remains key. This brings us to another dimension of women's engagement with history: studying and writing it. *Women Writing History: Three Generations,* by Romila Thapar, Kumkum Roy, and Preeti Gulati, brings together the voices of three Indian women historians across three generations.

Romila Thapar's entry into the field of history was accidental. Starting college in Pune, her education was interrupted by her family's move to Delhi – it was believed a young girl could not stay in a college hostel in the 1950s. At the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, she was taught by Arthur Basham. Reading de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* was "a big milestone in terms of how it anchored me." Listening to Eric Hobsbawm made her question who writes history and why. London exposed her to currents of change in the ideas of Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, Stuart Hall, Raymond Williams, and others. She became curious about the role of the individual in history. This question led her to research Ashoka, and her first book was published in 1961. "There were no book launches in those days, thank God."

Kumkum Roy grew up in Calcutta amid political discussions. College brought freedom. Moving to Delhi in the 1970s was different. The university included impressive women faculty - Thapar, R. Champakalakshmi, K. Meenakshi, Shereen Ratnagar, and Suvira Jaiswal. But a Sanskrit guru refused to teach Kumkum Vedic Sanskrit as she was a woman. Harassment was common on Delhi buses: "We learnt to use our shoulder bags as shields and our elbows as weapons...Carefree commuting was out of the question."

She also experienced harassment within the academic space. "I could not help thinking about how slowly things change, if at all they do."

Preeti Gulati, too, recalls harassment on the Metro. Within the family, too, gender norms were slow to change: "My Nani cried at the birth of every single girl child." Her interest in history began with silences around the Partition in her own family.

About her work as a historian, she reflects: "I think I subconsciously refuse to place gender at the forefront of my research because it occupies so much of my present and my everyday that I might risk losing my mind if I give it more space."

(Uma Mahadevan Dasgupta is in the IAS)

THE DAILY QUIZ

Please send in your answers to dailyquiz@thehindu.co.in

Here is a quiz on IKEA and its founder Ingvar Kamprad on his 100th birthday being celebrated on March 30

V. V. Ramanan

QUESTION 1
The name 'IKEA' is an acronym. What do the four letters stand for?

QUESTION 2
At what age did Kamprad start his first business activity by selling what common product to his neighbours?

QUESTION 3
In which year was IKEA founded and what was its first business model?

QUESTION 4
The LÖVET, a leaf-shaped side table, was the first piece of flat-pack furniture sold by IKEA in 1956. What was the inspiration to go into such a concept?

QUESTION 5
In 1994, Kamprad publicly apologised to his employees for "the greatest mistake of my life." What was the issue?

QUESTION 6
At IKEA, product names follow a taxonomy based on Scandinavian geography, language, and themes. So, what are the naming categories for beds & wardrobes, rugs and children's products?

QUESTION 7
As of late 2025, how many IKEA stores were operating worldwide and in how many markets?

Visual Question:
This is widely regarded as IKEA's all-time best-selling product, with a unit sold every 10 seconds globally. Name it. IKEA MUSEUM

Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz: 1. A cook from Ireland working in early 20th-century New York refused to believe she was making people sick because she herself never felt ill. However, the authorities detained her twice — the second time for life, on this day in 1915. She subsequently became a symbol of public health versus personal freedom. **Ans: Mary Mallon ("Typhoid Mary")**
2. Gaëtan Dugas was a Canadian flight attendant who was diagnosed in the early years of a disease that later became a devastating epidemic. What's the disease in question? **Ans: HIV/AIDS**
3. At a religious gathering in Seoul in 2020, one attendee with mild COVID-19 symptoms sat through multiple services over several days. Name the church at the centre of this incident. **Ans: Shincheonji**
4. More than 90% of people who get this disease are asymptomatic yet also shed the virus, allowing the disease to spread silently. **Ans: Polio**
5. In 2002, in Guangdong province in China, a doctor named Liu Jianlun became symptomatic of a disease, but still travelled to Hong Kong and infected 16 guests at the hotel where he stayed. As a result, the disease spread to Canada, Singapore, Taiwan, and Vietnam. **Ans: SARS**
Visual: Name this U.S. health worker who was forcibly detained after attending to Ebola patients during an outbreak in West Africa. **Ans: Kaci Hickox**
Early Birds: Varghese Joseph | Anju Sharma | Prem Nath Tiwari | K.N. Viswanathan | Sadhan Panda

KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

Opposition calls report hogwash

Minister accused of playing gooseberry in tense alliance talks

S. Upendran

What is the meaning and origin of 'hogwash'? (Bikram Das, Cuttack)
'Hogwash' has been a part of American English since the 15th century. Over the years, the word has undergone a change in meaning; today, it is mostly used in informal contexts to suggest disapproval. When you refer to someone's talk as being 'hogwash', what you are suggesting is that the individual is speaking nonsense; what he is saying is utter rubbish. The word can also be used to refer to one's terrible style of writing.

'Hogwash' comes from 'hog' and 'wash'. 'Hog' is mostly used to refer to a castrated pig, and 'wash' refers to the kitchen leftovers used to feed animals. For a long time, farmers mixed the leftovers from the kitchen with water and fed them to the hogs. This was the original meaning of the term. Since the food given to the animals had no nutritional value, any form of communication (speaking and writing) that lacked substance began to be called 'hogwash'. With the passage of time, the word began to be used to refer to cheap or worthless liquor as well.

What is the plural of 'antenna'? How is the word pronounced? (Dilip Nayar, Kannur)
The word 'antenna' consists of three syllables; the first is pronounced like the word 'an' and 'Ann'. The second sounds like the word 'ten', while the vowel in the third sounds like the 'a' in 'china'. The word is pronounced 'an-TEN-e' with the stress on the second syllable. The word has two possible plurals; one is to add the plural suffix 's'. The word is then pronounced 'an-TEN-as', and the stress continues to be on the second syllable. It is also possible to add the Latin suffix 'ae' to the word to make it a plural – in this case, it will be spelt 'antennae'. The first two syllables are pronounced like the first two syllables in 'antenna'. The final syllable 'ae', however, is pronounced like the 'ee' in 'fees', 'bees', and 'knees'. In this case, the word is pronounced 'an-TEN-ee'.

What is the meaning of the expression 'play gooseberry'? (L. Vibha, Secunderabad)
This is a role that most sane individuals would be reluctant to play. When two people are in love, they would like to be left alone – an unwanted third person entering the situation would be most unwelcome. When you 'play gooseberry', you become the unwanted third individual in the situation.

In the past, unmarried women were never left alone in the company of men – they were always accompanied by someone to keep an eye on things. This individual acted as a chaperone; she had to make sure that she could overhear most of the conversation, and at the same time, maintain a distance from the couple. If the couple stopped and sat down, it was the job of the chaperone to pretend that she was picking flowers or fruit – sometimes, it was gooseberry, and sometimes, apples. The expression 'to play gooseberry' is seldom heard nowadays – the unwanted person is nowadays usually referred to as the 'third wheel'.

upendrankye@gmail.com

Word of the day

Scurry:
rushing about hastily in an undignified way

Synonyms: hurry, sprint, scoot

Usage: *People scurried in a rush to the gate.*

Pronunciation: newsth.live/scurry

International Phonetic Alphabet: /skʌri/

For feedback and suggestions for Text & Context, please write to **letters@thehindu.co.in** with the subject 'Text & Context'

In reverence

Faith forward: Devotees carrying palm leaves take part in a Palm Sunday procession at St. Francis Xavier's Cathedral in Bengaluru on Sunday, marking the beginning of Holy Week that concludes with Easter. ALLEN EGENUSE J.

Metro services disrupted on Purple Line

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

The Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BMRCL) on Sunday announced a temporary disruption in services on the Purple Line owing to scheduled maintenance work.

According to BMRCL Chief Public Relations Officer B.L. Yeshwanth Chavan, train services between Garudacharpalya Metro station and M.G. Road Metro station were suspended from 7 a.m. to 7.45 a.m on Sunday.

"Train services on the Purple Line between Garudacharpalya Metro station and M.G. Road Metro station are temporarily suspended from 7 a.m. to 7.45 a.m. due to maintenance work. Services are expected to resume at 7.45 a.m.," he had said. Mr. Chavan clarified that operations on other stretches of the Purple Line continued as usual during this period.

He also noted that there was no impact on services along the Green Line and Yellow Line, which were functioning normally.

Temporary halt

The temporary halt disrupted early morning commuters travelling along the busy Purple Line corridor, as the maintenance announcement came only on Sunday morning when the work began, leaving passengers with no time to alter their plans or arrange alternative modes of transport.

Services resumed as scheduled at 7.45 a.m. after completion of the maintenance work.

BU turns to social media to improve enrolment

A decision was taken at a recent special Syndicate meeting of the university to emphasise skill development and infrastructure, including the introduction of new courses to attract students

Jayanth R.
BENGALURU

Bangalore University has directed the principals of its affiliated colleges to promote their courses, campuses, and facilities through social media campaigns and outreach visits to nearby Pre-University (PU) colleges to attract students to various degree programmes.

In addition, a decision was taken at a recent special Syndicate meeting of the university to emphasise skill development and infrastructure, including the introduction of new courses to attract students.

There are a total of 284 government, aided, and private degree colleges under the jurisdiction of Bangalore University, with about 40,000 seats, including in arts, commerce, science, and management streams. However, out of these, only about 28,000 to 30,000 seats are filled every year.

However, the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education across the country is 28%, and the Union and the State governments have set a target of increasing it to 50% GER by 2035. To achieve this target, it is imperative to increase admissions in degree colleges.

There are a total of 284 government, aided, and private degree colleges under the jurisdiction of Bangalore University. FILE PHOTO

"Due to various reasons, the total sanctioned intake for degree courses in the affiliated colleges of our university are not being filled. Every year, more than 10,000 seats remain vacant. In this context, a meeting was recently called with the principals of all the top colleges. During this, it was felt that admissions could be improved if they promote their colleges, courses, and available facilities on social media platforms," said Jayakara S.M., Vice-Chancellor of Bangalore University. "In addition, there are many government degree colleges within our limits, and there are no websites or social media platforms for the promotion of these colleges. In this context, this year, the university has decided to focus more on social media promotion to attract students," he added.

"The current generation is using social media more. Therefore, all colleges have been advised to open Facebook, 'X', and Instagram accounts in addition to promoting the courses through their websites. They have been advised to send information to parents and students' WhatsApp groups. In addition, if they link to our university website, we will also promote the colleges," he explained.

Along with social media promotion, Bangalore University has instructed its affiliated colleges to go to PU colleges to promote to and persuade the students.

"Professional colleges have already started campaigning for admission to all PU colleges. However, the colleges under our jurisdiction are mostly enrolled by arts, science and commerce students. Therefore, the principals of all colleges have been advised to go to their nearest PU colleges and persuade the students by advertising through handbills. This will help the students who are interested in the courses to make a decision soon," explained Dr. Jayakara.

Further, he stated that, in order to increase admission in degree colleges, all their affiliated colleges have been advised to start the admission process soon. "If admission is delayed, students will turn to other colleges. Therefore, it has been advised to complete the admission without waiting for the completion of the admission to professional courses. This will help us conduct the degree semester exams on time and give the results early," he added.

In the recent special Syndicate meeting, the university has decided to take the appropriate steps to increase admissions.

As per the report given by the Local Inquiry Committees of the university, it has been advised to develop basic infrastructure and rectify deficiencies in the colleges.

A SPECIAL PUBLICATION FROM THE HINDU GROUP

THE HINDU GROUP

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provides chronological, contextual, and factual information on the key events that occupied public attention **between January and December 2025.**

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Felicitation ceremony

BENGALURU: REVA University hosted Abhinandan 2026, its annual felicitation ceremony honouring students on Saturday.

Timings
BENGALURU

MONDAY, MAR. 30	
RISE 06:17	SET 18:31
RISE 16:21	SET 04:16
TUESDAY, MAR. 31	
RISE 06:17	SET 18:31
RISE 17:11	SET 04:55
WEDNESDAY, APR. 01	
RISE 06:16	SET 18:31
RISE 18:00	SET 05:33

Bengaluru Weather	max	min
Tumakuru	30	20
Mysuru	35	19
Bengaluru	34	21

Bengaluru Today
33°C The weather will be day. Day will be warm. Night will be slight cool.

Bengaluru Tomorrow
34°C Morning will be pleasant. Day will be warm. Night will be pleasant. Dry weather to occur.

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THE HINDU
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Two killed after car rams into two-wheeler

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

Two persons were killed on the spot after a car allegedly driven under the influence of alcohol crashed into a two-wheeler on a one-way road near the Waqf Board office within the High Grounds Traffic Police Station limits on Saturday night. The deceased have been identified as Zubair Ahmed, 42, and Abdul Muneer Pasha, 16.

The accused driver, Ayyappa, was allegedly driving a car in an inebriated state.Both riders died on the spot.

The accused driver was taken into custody. A case has been registered.

*T&Cs apply. Images shown are for representational purposes only. Actual products may vary. For actual product images, refer to the catalogue. #Savings calculated on comparison between 5-Star BEE rated Ethora Prime fan and a non-star rated fan of comparable size and category, based on standard test conditions, average electricity tariff of ₹ 6.5 /unit, and assumed usage of 16 hours per day over a period of 5 years. Actual savings may vary depending on electricity tariffs, usage patterns, operating conditions, maintenance and individual consumer circumstances. This is an illustrative estimate and not a guarantee of savings.

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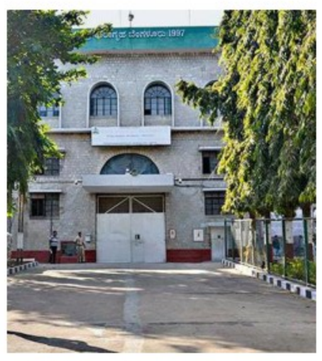
ENERGY SAVINGS GUIDE

A BG-BGE

From Page One

Viral prison video may have been staged

In one clip, inmates were heard discussing upcoming IPL matches and portraying a comfortable lifestyle inside the jail. The inmates also allegedly made claims implicating the DGP in facilitating access to banned goods.



A file photo of the Parappana Agrahara jail complex.

However, initial findings suggest the video may have been staged as a retaliation against stricter enforcement measures introduced under Mr. Kumar's leadership.

Following the leak of the alleged clips, prison authorities carried out a search operation in Barrack No. 9. During the inspection, officials recovered a mobile phone hidden inside a drainage pipe, wrapped in used milk packets in an apparent attempt to evade routine checks.

A recurring problem

A case has been registered at Parappana Agrahara Police Station against the three inmates. They have been shifted to quarantine cells as part of disciplinary action, officials said.

During questioning, the accused allegedly confessed that the video was created to frame prison authorities in response to tightened rules.

Warders suspended

Taking serious note of the incident, Mr. Kumar ordered the immediate suspension of three warders, Shivananda, Niranjan A. Kamath, and Hanumanthappa for alleged dereliction of duty and ordered a probe.

The jail administration has also been directed to submit a detailed explanation regarding how mobile phones entered a high-security barrack.

The Police Department is currently verifying whether the video was genuinely shot inside the prison premises or staged elsewhere to resemble jail conditions.

Investigators are also examining the possibility that inmates accessed mobile network signals from nearby telecom towers. Discussions are under way with service providers to restrict signal access around the prison to prevent misuse.

Ruling LDF has backing of communal forces: UDF

Cong. leaders accuse Pinarayi Vijayan of orchestrating a vote deal with SDPI; row escalates after SDPI withdrew candidates in Vengara and Mankada; CM evades response on rejecting SDPI votes

Abdul Latheef Naha
MALAPPURAM

The UDF is accusing CPI(M) of forging a vote deal with the Social Democratic Party of India. K.K. MUSTAFAH

After years of accusing the United Democratic Front (UDF) of cosying up to communal forces, the Communist Party Of India (Marxist) [CPI(M)] now finds itself on the defensive, facing similar allegations from its long-time rival front. The UDF is accusing the party of forging an unholy nexus with the Social Democratic Party of India (SDPI), the political arm of the banned Popular Front of India (PFI).

Over the past six years, the CPI(M) had relentlessly criticised the UDF for receiving support from the Welfare Party of India (WPI), linked to the Jamaat-e-Islami Hind, branding the alliance as communal. Ironically, the Jamaat-e-Islami had backed the Left Democratic Front (LDF) in Kerala until 2019, and the CPI(M) had never labelled them communal during that period.

The political landscape shifted when the UDF began highlighting the alleged SDPI backing for the CPI(M).

Opposition's allegations

Leader of the Opposition V.D. Satheesan and senior Congress leader Ramesh Chennithala directly accused Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan of orchestrating a vote deal with the SDPI. Political heat increased after the SDPI withdrew candidates in Vengara and Mankada, where the LDF is supporting Independents against the UDF's K.M. Shaji and Manjalamkuzhi Ali, respectively. The move has emboldened UDF leaders to attack the CPI(M) on the communal front.

Evasive response

Persistent questions about the alleged SDPI support rattled the Chief Minister on Sunday. When asked, Mr. Vijayan told presspersons to approach the SDPI for clarification rather than him, and accused the media of pursuing a "special agenda". He skirted direct answers on whether the CPI(M) would reject SDPI votes. Instead, he tried to turn the spotlight back on the UDF for its alleged communal alliances.

At a press meet, Mr. Vijayan reiterated that the CPI(M) had never aligned with communal forces, maintaining a stance against both minority and majority communalism, both of which he described as dangerous for the State.

CPI(M) national general secretary M.A. Baby denied the UDF's allegations. However, like Mr. Vijayan, he refrained from committing that the LDF would reject SDPI votes. According to analysts, the cautious and evasive responses of the CPI(M) leaders reflect the party's current predicament, as the UDF skilfully weaponises the same communal narrative that the CPI(M) has used for years.

SFI petitions EC over MCC violation by IAS officer

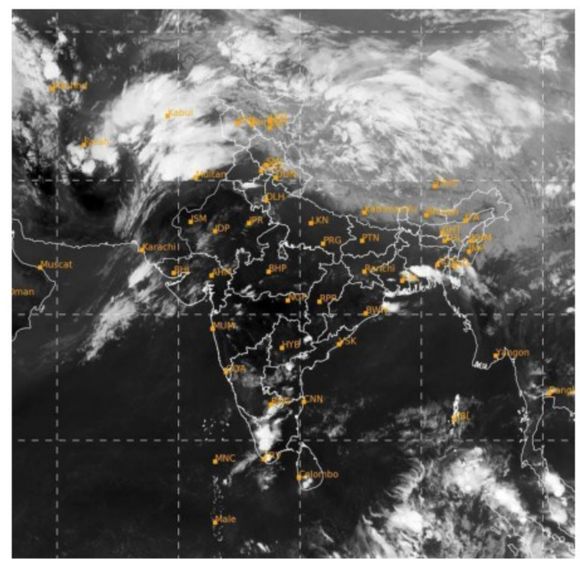
The Hindu Bureau
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Students Federation of India has filed a complaint with the Chief Electoral Officer, Kerala, against senior IAS officer B. Ashok for alleged breach of the All India Services (Conduct) Rules, 1968, and the Model Code of Conduct.

The bureaucrat has been accused of attempting to influence voters and disparage the LDF government through a magazine article and during a prime-time television debate.

WEATHERWATCH

Rainfall, temperature & air quality in select metros yesterday



TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD, POLLUTION DATA: CPCB, MAP: INSAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 17.00 HRS)

Forecast for Monday: Heavy rainfall likely at isolated places over Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura. Thunderstorm accompanied with hailstorm likely at isolated places over East Rajasthan, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Uttarakhand and West Madhya Pradesh.

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	0.3	32.6	20.5	Kozhikode	0.2	35.8	26.2
Ahmedabad	—	36.4	25.0	Kurnool	—	40.0	27.3
Aizawl	16.8	30.6	17.6	Lucknow	—	35.7	20.0
Allahabad	—	38.9	18.8	Madurai	—	39.0	25.6
Bengaluru	1.0	34.7	20.5	Mangaluru	31.0	33.8	22.4
Bhopal	—	36.6	22.2	Mumbai	—	33.4	24.7
Bhubaneswar	—	35.9	26.0	Mysuru	17.0	34.6	19.0
Chandigarh	2.0	27.3	19.2	New Delhi	—	35.7	20.9
Chennai	—	31.4	26.3	Patna	—	33.5	21.4
Coimbatore	—	37.8	22.5	Port Blair	—	32.4	24.7
Dehradun	—	27.4	18.8	Puducherry	—	32.6	24.0
Gangtok	13.0	17.5	10.2	Pune	—	35.4	14.7
Goa	—	34.3	24.4	Raipur	—	39.6	24.7
Guwahati	4.0	23.4	18.2	Ranchi	—	33.6	18.0
Hubballi	—	36.0	23.0	Shillong	6.0	18.2	10.4
Hyderabad	—	38.5	24.1	Shimla	1.0	15.8	9.8
Imphal	5.0	25.1	14.3	Srinagar	9.0	19.6	10.3
Jaipur	—	36.5	24.3	Thiruvananthapuram	—	37.8	25.0
Kochi	26.0	32.0	22.8	Tiruchi	—	37.9	25.4
Kohima	18.0	18.4	10.2	Vijayawada	—	37.8	26.0
Kolkata	—	33.4	24.7	Visakhapatnam	—	32.9	27.2

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Pollutants in the air you are breathing

CITIES	SO_2	NO_2	CO	PM2.5	PM10	CODE
Ahmedabad	5	.12	.23	20	103	
Bengaluru	3	.53	.22	91	124	
Chennai	3	.12	—	36	63	
Delhi	.53	.45	103	339	229	
Hyderabad	2	7	.30	153	146	
Kolkata	5	.16	7	26	65	
Lucknow	6	.46	.28	199	122	
Mumbai	.31	.12	.14	8	89	
Pune	—	.25	.11	65	84	
Visakhapatnam	.42	.35	.17	49	120	

Yesterday

In observation made at 4.00 p.m., Greater Noida, Uttar Pradesh recorded an overall air quality index (AQI) score of 260 indicating an unhealthy level of pollution. In contrast, Kohima, Nagaland recorded a healthy AQI score of 21

Air Quality Code: Poor | Moderate | Good (Readings indicate average AQI)

SO_2: Sulphur Dioxide. Short-term exposure can harm the respiratory system, making breathing difficult. It can affect visibility by reacting with other air particles to form haze and stain culturally important objects such as statues and monuments.

NO_2: Nitrogen Dioxide. Aggravates respiratory illness, causes haze to form by reacting with other air particles, causes acid rain, pollutes coastal waters.

CO: Carbon monoxide. High concentration in air reduces oxygen supply to critical organs like the heart and brain. At very high levels, it can cause dizziness, confusion, unconsciousness and even death.

PM2.5 & PM10: Particulate matter pollution can cause irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, coughing, chest tightness and shortness of breath, reduced lung function, irregular heartbeat, asthma attacks, heart attacks and premature death in people with heart or lung disease

Voices against war

Mass demonstration: Supporters of Left parties and activists stage a protest rally near Charminar, condemning the West Asia conflict, in Hyderabad on Sunday. SIDDHANT THAKUR

DMK promises homemakers ₹8,000 coupon for buying home appliances of their choice

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

other leaders releasing the manifesto in Chennai on Sunday. R. RAGU

Unveiling what he described as a "superstar" manifesto for the coming Tamil Nadu Assembly election, DMK president and Chief Minister M.K. Stalin on Sunday promised a ₹8,000 coupon to all "non-Income Tax paying" homemakers to buy any electronic home appliance of their choice from the nearest stores.

The manifesto, released at the party headquarters Anna Arivalayam in Chennai, sought to strike a balance between welfare schemes backed by adequate financial support and serious political issues such as federalism, Centre-State relations, and the imposition of Hindi. On the one hand, it promised to popularise the Justice Kurian Committee report on Centre-State relations, and on the other, it announced a host of incentives.

Claiming that the DMK's manifesto had always been the "hero" of elections, Mr. Stalin said the *Illatharasi* scheme – which will allow homemakers to buy or replace household appliances – would be the "heroine" of the 2026 election. "The manifesto will enter the fray as a superstar," he said.

Questioning whether the government had the funds to support such a scheme, he said similar doubts were raised in 2021, but the DMK government kept all its promises and also implemented schemes not promised in the manifesto.

He said that the government would mobilise resources for the implementation of welfare schemes and infrastructure projects launched in the past five years and generate funds through special financial management measures.

Reiterating its commitment to securing Tamil Nadu's due share from the Centre, as per the recommendations of the 16th Finance Commission, the manifesto said efforts would be made to identify deserving beneficiaries by reducing unnecessary expenditure.

BRS MLAs suspended amid illegal mining row in Telangana Assembly

M. Rajeev
HYDERABAD

Illegal mining of sand, granite and other minerals in some parts of Telangana rocked the Legislative Assembly on Sunday, leading to suspension of over a dozen Bharat Rashtra Samiti (BRS) members from the House.

Immediately after the House convened, BRS members led by deputy floor leader T. Harish Rao and working president K.T. Rama Rao raised slogans demanding a House committee to probe mining irregularities and the sacking of Revenue Minister Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy, over his alleged involvement in illegal mining.

With the Treasury Benches unmoved, Opposition members thronged the Well of the House, raising slogans against the government's inaction. Repeated requests by Speaker G. Prasad Kumar for members to resume their seats went in vain.

Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy intervened and requested the Speaker to suspend the agitated members for two days, to ensure the remaining business, including passage of key Bills, was completed.

Legislative Affairs Minister D. Sridhar Babu moved a motion to suspend the BRS members, which was passed by voice vote.

The House also saw heated exchanges between the ruling and Opposition parties owing to behaviour of BRS member Padi Kaushik Reddy for allegedly making threatening gestures towards member Kadiyam Sridhari.

Mr. Reddy refused the Opposition's demand for a House panel, saying its report would ultimately be handed to the investigating agencies.

"The report has to go to government agencies such as the CID or CBI. We have already announced a comprehensive inquiry by the CB-CID into the issue," he said. The Chief Minister explained that the government had ordered the probe to ensure that there was no scope for "looting of public money"

On TDP's 44th foundation day, leaders call for unity, continued development

The Hindu Bureau
VIJAYAWADA

TDP leaders pay tribute to TDP founder N.T. Rama Rao at his statue in Kadapa on Sunday. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

The Telugu Desam Party (TDP) on Sunday celebrated its 44th foundation day, with leaders across the political spectrum extending greetings and emphasising the need to strengthen alliance unity for the continued development of Andhra Pradesh.

Founded by actor-turned-politician N.T. Rama Rao on the plank of Telugu self-respect, the party has completed over four decades of a significant political journey, marked by electoral successes, challenges and ideological battles.

Chief Minister and TDP national president N. Chandrababu Naidu, in his message, described the party as a reflection of the aspirations of generations of Telugu people. He reiterated the party's commitment to the welfare of the poor and its founding principle of ensuring food, shelter and clothing for the underprivileged. Calling the foundation day a "festival for every party worker," he conveyed greetings to cadres across the State.

TDP national general secretary Nara Lokesh highlighted the party's role in uplifting marginalised communities and bringing welfare-oriented governance into national discourse. He said the TDP continues to strive toward making Telugu people globally prominent while carrying forward the ideals of its founder.

Extending wishes on the occasion, Andhra Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister and Jana Sena Party (JSP) president K. Pawan Kalyan recalled the party's historic role in shaping the political landscape of undivided Andhra Pradesh.

Stressing that the State's progress is closely tied to coalition unity, he called upon alliance partners to further strengthen their collective spirit.

10-year-old beaten to death; no clue about culprits

The Hindu Bureau
NANDIWADA

A 10-year-old boy was beaten to death by some miscreants at Nandiwada in Krishna district of Andhra Pradesh. The boy was studying in Class 4. His grandmother suffered critical injuries and was admitted to a hospital in Vijayawada.

The miscreants attacked the boy and the old woman with boulders when they were asleep. The reason for the attack was not known immediately, said Krishna district Superintendent of Police (SP) V. Vidyasagar Naidu.

The police have registered a case.

EDUCATIONPLUS

From rote to the roots

Why bridge courses are important for students entering college

GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

A. Joseph Dorairaj

A bridge course is a preparatory one just before the start of a new academic year to help students transition smoothly from school to university. The twin objectives are to fill knowledge gaps and help students acclimatise themselves to a new environment.

For many students, bridge courses often revolve around transitions: to a higher knowledge ecosystem, to another medium of instruction (often from regional language to English), and from rural to urban or semi-urban settings. But, for all, the most crucial is the passage to young adulthood.

Problems

In many institutions, bridge courses do not yield the desired results. This is because some teachers, fuelled by the notion that they have to give the students a head start, try to package the curricula of the first semester into this time.

Another issue is that most adopt the same pedagogy of a regular class: the lecture method. Whereas an interactive method would be more suitable for the needs of these students.

Also, a bridge course classroom, is heterogeneous in nature. Teachers need to vary their teaching styles and strategies to cater to the differential abilities of the students.

Many institutions do not have a proper curriculum or textbooks for such courses. Even the schedule is tentative. So the faculty have to improvise and, often, do it badly.

Bridge courses are meant as much for academics as for socialisation and peer teaching and learning. However, the latter aspect is ignored. Bridge schools should not be confused with summer schools, which are rigorous and intensive programmes and are meant to boost students' domain knowledge.

Strategies

All these problems can be overcome by adopting certain efficient strategies. First, the faculty must understand that the objectives of a bridge course and a regular undergraduate programme are different and deploy appropriate pedagogies in the classroom. There should be less teacher-talk and more student-talk, making the classroom student-centric and interactive.

Second, the focus must be on academics and social integration. To facilitate this, peer teaching and mentoring, especially by senior students, should be encouraged.

Third is the inclusion of fun-filled activities that will effectively help in social integration and, as Krashen argued, make learning meaningful and faster when the affective filter is low.

Finally, a bridge course is a short-term programme. What could not be taught over 12 years of study in terms of domain knowledge and proficiency cannot be achieved in a couple of weeks. So, neither the student nor the faculty should expect miracles.

Bridge courses must focus on enhancing the participants' communication skills in English and deepen basic knowledge of the discipline's concepts to wean them away from rote memorisation and acquire knowledge in a systematic manner. This will provide a foundation for their undergraduate programme.

When conducted efficiently, bridge courses help students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, to move to a different medium of instruction and also cope with the change to a college environment.

They are meant to acclimatise students to different intellectual and physical environments and fill knowledge gaps to some extent. In any rite of passage, the liminal space leading to aggregation is a crucial step and, therefore, bridge course participants should be helped to cross the threshold of liminality and enter the university.

The writer is an Emeritus Professor at Gandhigram Rural Institute Deemed-to-be University. Email: josephdorairaj@gmail.com

OFF THE EDGE
Nandini Raman

Clarity of intent is important

Uncertain about your career options? Low on self-confidence? This column may help

I am 25 and have six years of full-time experience in insurance claims. Should I quit my job and prepare for CMAT to pursue PGDM at the National Insurance Academy, Pune, or for banking exams? Srijeet

Dear Srijeet,

If you want a stable government job with fixed career progression and security, along with a good work-life balance, choose banking. But it comes with a growth ceiling. There are transfers. It offers limited flexibility to switch to corporate strategy or analytics later.

But if you are looking at a fast-track career growth in insurance or BFSI, a specialised PGDM in Insurance and Risk Management will bring higher starting packages and access to managerial roles and open doors to corporate finance, analytics, underwriting, and leadership. However, cracking the entrance exam is tough; you will need to quit your job to prepare. The tuition fee is high and, while placements are good, they are not guaranteed. Can you manage for two years without the financial base your job provides?

I completed my Master's in Computer Science in the U.S. a year ago, but am concerned about AI's impact. I am considering a career in elder care abroad. I am 25, empathetic, and enjoy caring for others. Would this be a suitable career choice? Sai

Dear Sai,

Elder care is a great option and in constant demand. It is recession-resistant and countries like India, the U.S., Canada, Japan, and Australia have a dire need for good workers to look after the elderly. Some countries offer long-term employment and visa support. The roles require empathy, patience, decision-making, physical presence and constant care giving. Consider doing a Master's in Social Work for exposure to working with a geriatric population and explore specific areas that interest you. Some roles in this field include caregiver or personal support worker, nurse or home health aide, and elderly wellness coordinator or activity manager.

While this can give you high job satisfaction, you also need to be emotionally fit and stable. These roles have a high burnout rate, as they are physically demanding and involve handling sickness and serious illness all the time.

To grow in this space, focus on building skills in basic healthcare and first aid, understanding elder psychology and communication, as well as nutrition, mobility support, and personal care. Certifications such as a nursing assistant or CNA are highly valuable. Additionally, your background in Computer Science can help you work with elder-care technology like apps and monitoring systems to track health and mobility data, and provide more personalised care. Research country-specific certification requirements (Canada, Australia, the U.S.) and take short-term elder care or nursing assistant courses online.

I am a Class 11 Humanities student (ISC board) interested in studying Archaeology while also preparing for the UPSC. How do I manage preparation for both? Which course at Banaras Hindu University would suit my goals? Sarada

Dear Sarada,

Banaras Hindu University (BHU) offers B.A. (Hons) Ancient Indian History, Culture and Archaeology. Admission is via CUET and BHU-UET. Post your B.A., you can do an M.A. Ancient Indian History and Archaeology also at BHU. Archaeology will help with the UPSC preparation, as the syllabus involves ancient history in the General Studies Paper 1 and build strong analysis and reading skills that help in the Mains. To manage your B.A. and UPSC preparation, focus on your coursework during the week and dedicate at least two hours on the weekend for the UPSC.

A study strategy that blends both goals: for the first two years, work on your B.A. and UPSC foundation. Read NCERT Class 6–12 history textbooks, basic general studies and newspapers. In the last year of your B.A., intensify UPSC prep (especially GS) and consider joining a foundation course (online/offline) if feasible. Start working on the test series and answer writing.

I am in the third year of B.Sc. Physics and want to pursue a Master's. Are there lucrative opportunities after graduation? Ansa

Dear Ansa,

A typical progression to M.Sc. Physics involves a specialisation in Condensed Matter Physics, Quantum Mechanics, Quantum Computing, Astrophysics, Space Science, Material Science, Nanotechnology, or Computational or Theoretical Physics. After this, you can go for a Ph.D. or an integrated research programme. Job opportunities after M.Sc. involve teaching in colleges or universities after taking the NET or JRF or in organisations like the ISRO, DRDO, BARC, CSIR. Great opportunities exist in space and defence sector, the Civil Services and in government.

Disclaimer: This column is merely a guiding voice and provides advice and suggestions on education and careers.

The writer is a practising counsellor and a trainer. Send your questions to eduplus.thehindu@gmail.com with the subject line Off the Edge

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Neighbours first

India must invite Nepal's new Prime Minister, Balen Shah, to revive ties

In an exchange of early messages, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Nepal's newly-sworn-in Prime Minister Balendra "Balen" Shah said they look forward to "working closely" to take forward bilateral ties. Delhi and Kathmandu are prepared to begin a new chapter in relations, united by familial bonds, a shared culture, open borders, and intertwined politics. Landlocked Nepal has depended on trade and transit through India, with India's plans for an energy grid in the region an important channel for Nepal's hydropower exports and revenues. Like many former leaders of Nepal, Mr. Shah studied in India. Familiarity aside, it would be a mistake to assume that his ascension will chart a well-worn and predictable course between the two countries. At 35, he is Nepal's first Madhesi leader, and upturns the old dominance of the Brahmin-Chettri Pahadi elite. New Delhi must have a greater understanding of the priorities of this new Gen-Z movement that brought down the K.P. Sharma Oli government in 2025. This is a new leadership that has not inherited the old foreign policy understandings of the past generations of leaders that came through the panchayati movement, Congress and Communist parties, or the Maoist movement that overthrew the monarchy. In that sense, the Shah government's foreign policy, including its ties with China and the U.S., as well as the overarching relationship with India, is yet to be formalised. In the past decade, India has increased its development assistance to Nepal, but it also strained its ties over the constitution, the long blockade on border trade, and territorial issues. As Mayor of Kathmandu, Mr. Shah was known for his overt nationalism, and rejection of the "hegemony" of India and other powers, while his use of a map of "Greater Nepal" had been read with some concern in New Delhi.

The Modi government should tread lightly, and positively, as the Shah government finds its feet, but offer India's full support in dealing with Nepal's immediate challenges. Among those are the impacts of the war in West Asia where Nepal will need help with fuel and fertilizer imports. Approximately 14% of Nepal's population (about 3.5 million) work abroad, and the country is dependent on remittances and tourism revenues. New Delhi could also reconsider requests from previous Nepali governments to allow overflight for new Nepali airports, reduce restrictions on purchasing Nepali power produced with third-country assistance and to update the bilateral friendship treaty. Differences delayed New Delhi's invitation in 2024 to Mr. Oli, upon his election – he eventually visited Beijing first. It is time to quickly invite Mr. Shah to visit Delhi at the earliest, and for Delhi and Kathmandu to move forward, putting "Neighbours first" in South Asia.

On a wing

Subsidies will not create demand for air travel to small towns

In a bid to revive the regional aviation sector, the Union Cabinet has signed off on a 'Modified UDAN' scheme with a sixfold higher outlay. The scheme had first been launched to expand aviation to interior areas, using scheduled commuter airlines. Even then, industry analysts and experts had complained that UDAN did not make a viable business case for small regional airlines due to a lack of supporting infrastructure, low or unpredictable passenger demand, insufficient coverage of operating costs, and lack of awareness. In Modified UDAN, the subsidy period for tier-II and tier-III routes has been increased from three years to five years, an extension at least one of the small carriers had sought under UDAN before the COVID-19 pandemic hit. The exchequer will also fund the subsidies directly rather than having airlines levy an additional charge from passengers, with the government setting aside ₹10,043 crore over the next decade to this end. The government will also spend ₹12,159 crore to redevelop a hundred unused airstrips, ₹3,661 crore to build 200 helipads in remote areas, and purchase aircraft and helicopters for state carriers to boost last-mile connectivity to better match the mode of transport to actual demand and geography. The scheme will also pay for ongoing costs such as staffing and maintenance of low-traffic airports.

Regional aviation in India is structurally fragile and unlikely to become widely self-sustaining due to the unyieldingly high cost per passenger, price sensitivity, competition from rail and road transport, and operational inefficiencies. UDAN did not address them adequately and, sadly, Modified UDAN carries that failing over. The foremost one is weak underlying demand, with UDAN often picking routes with insufficient economic activity even as leisure and occasional travel could not sustain regular flights. Extending the subsidies, even if they are eased from the third year onwards, could keep routes alive for longer but will not of itself create demand. In this sense, the government's reluctance to revisit how it identifies and nurtures routes, and how different transport modes might substitute for air travel in low-density regions, seems inexplicable. The emphasis on last-mile connectivity and better planning also appears only partially incorporated as the details the Civil Aviation Ministry shared did not mention ground transport links or integrated scheduling, among others. Whether the decision to sustain connectivity using sustained government support, rather than cultivate a market that can stand on its own, will lead to lasting changes depends on whether route selection and integration with broader transport and economic networks improve in practice.

A missed opportunity to guarantee minimum wages

Jean Drèze

Visiting Professor at the Department of Economics, Ranchi University, Ranchi, Jharkhand

There has been a lively debate in the last few months about the respective merits of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) and Viksit Bharat – Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) Act, or VB-G RAM G Act for short. Absent from this debate, however, is a critical issue that haunts both Acts: wage rates.

A key parameter

The wage rate is a critical parameter of employment guarantee. A relatively high wage rate can create a lot of enthusiasm among workers, as it happened in the early days of MGNREGA. And, enthusiasm is important for the success of the programme. Conversely, wage suppression can easily be used to restrain the programme or even phase it out over time. Wage rates, in any case, also have a strong influence on programme costs.

The wage rates of MGNREGA workers are determined under Section 6 of the Act. This section has two parts. The first part, Section 6(1), empowers the central government to notify MGNREGA wage rates. Different rates can be notified for different "areas", and in practice, this has come to mean different States.

Section 6(2) states that until such time as the central government notifies wage rates under Section 6(1), State-specific minimum wages apply. More precisely, MGNREGA workers are entitled to the minimum wage notified by the State government for agricultural labourers.

MGNREGA came into force on February 2, 2006. Until 2009, the central government abstained from notifying wages under Section 6(1). Therefore, State-specific minimum wages applied. In many States, minimum wages for agricultural labourers were higher than market wages at that time. This is one reason why MGNREGA was so popular in those days.

In some States, there were significant increases in minimum wages between 2006 and 2009. The most notable instance was a sharp increase in the minimum wage in Uttar Pradesh in 2007-8 (when Ms. Mayawati was Chief Minister), from ₹58 to ₹100 per day. Some observers argued that State governments were indulging in unrestrained increases in minimum wages because MGNREGA wages were fully paid by the central government. Others countered that State governments had to pay the same wage on their own public works, and that this would be a restraining factor. They also argued that, except in Uttar Pradesh, there was little evidence of sharp increases in minimum wages.

The jury was still out on this when, in late 2009, the central government pressed the panic button and notified MGNREGA wage rates under Section 6(1). In the short term, this led to a further increase in wages, as the central government notified ₹100 per day in most States, with a top-up in States where the minimum wage was above that norm. This was sold as a pro-worker move, in pursuance of a promise made by the Congress Party in the run-up to the 2009 general election. Over time, however, this move enabled the central government to moderate the growth of MGNREGA wages. In fact, the central government froze MGNREGA wages in real terms from then on. To this day, wages are raised State-wise every year to the extent of price increases (based on the Consumer Price Index for Agricultural Labourers), but not more.

> The VB-G RAM G Act is a missed opportunity to correct serious anomalies in the determination of wage rates for MGNREGA workers

Real-wage freeze consequences

This real-wage freeze rapidly led to two serious issues. First, MGNREGA wages started lagging behind minimum wages in many States, as minimum wages rose in real terms but MGNREGA wages did not. By 2025-26, the MGNREGA wage rate was lower – often much lower – than the minimum wage of agricultural labourers in most States, according to a recent analysis by Laavanya Tamang. This defeats an important purpose of MGNREGA: sustaining minimum wages. It also raises the question whether it is at all legal for the government to pay MGNREGA workers less than the minimum wage (this matter was taken up in the Supreme Court of India but was not clearly settled).

The other issue is that MGNREGA wages also started lagging behind market wages. Between 2009 and 2014, real wages were rising quite rapidly in rural India, partly because MGNREGA was tightening the labour market. By 2014, the ratio of MGNREGA wage rate to agricultural wage was around 60% for men and 75% for women at the all-India level, according to Labour Bureau data. The gap maintained itself from then on, as rural wage rates stagnated in real terms.

The real gap is actually much bigger than it looks. The reason is that market wages are not only higher than MGNREGA wages but also (generally) paid on time - often the same day. MGNREGA wages, by contrast, are often paid after long and uncertain delays. The central government keeps denying this, but the evidence is clear, notably from recent studies by the LibTech group. In fact, not only are there delays, sometimes, MGNREGA wages are not paid at all, for example due to technical failures of the Aadhaar-based Payment System or National Mobile Monitoring System. The result is a tremendous "discouragement effect" – many rural workers have lost interest in MGNREGA.

The absence of any marked decline in MGNREGA employment generation levels may seem to contradict this. A recent analysis of Periodic Labour Force Survey data, however, suggests that MGNREGA employment levels are in fact much lower today than they were in the early years of all-India implementation, contrary to official statistics. The growing gap between official statistics and actual employment seems to reflect a major increase in leakages in the same period.

The discouragement effect and the resurgence of corruption are integrally related. When workers lose interest, there is no vigilance. Worse, workers may be tempted to cooperate with corrupt elements instead of working by the rules.

Continuing policy failure

Unfortunately, the VB-G RAM G Act is all set to perpetuate this crisis. For one thing, it does not contain any new, constructive provisions that might help to ensure the timely payment of wages or to curb corruption. For another, it continues to empower the central government to determine wage rates (under Section 10), even as the rationale for this has vanished.

Remember, the argument for an early switch from Section 6(2) to Section 6(1) under MGNREGA was that, when wages are fully paid by the central government, they should not be determined by the State government. Under the VB-G RAM G Act, however, wage costs are shared 60:40 between Centre and States. There was every reason to drop MGNREGA's Section 6(1) from the VB-G RAM G Act and revert to the principle of Section 6(2): guaranteed payment of minimum wages. Instead, the central government did the opposite: it dropped Section 6(2) and retained Section 6(1), giving itself perpetual powers to set the wage rates of VB-G RAM G workers.

There is another issue here. Section 6(1) of MGNREGA began with a non-obstante clause ("Notwithstanding anything contained in the Minimum Wages Act, 1948") that acted as a kind of legal fig leaf for overriding minimum wages. Oddly, there is no equivalent of this clause in the VB-G RAM G Act. But then, how can the central government justify paying anything less than minimum wages?

A way forward would be for the central government to notify wage rates equal to or higher than minimum wages in all States (under MGNREGA or the VB-G RAM G Act, as the case may be). This would feed many birds with one crumb. It would put wage payments on a sound legal footing. It would lead to a much-needed increase in real wages. And, it would also produce a simple rule for updating wage rates over time.

More likely, the central government will prolong the real-wage freeze and use it as a means of ensuring that employment generation under the VB-G RAM G Act declines over time. If so, the wage freeze should be challenged in court. Indeed, with the non-obstante clause removed, the payment of anything less than minimum wages is patently illegal.

A Bill that secures IPS officers' role in deputation

R.K. Vij

A former Indian Police Service (IPS) officer

On March 25, 2026, the central government introduced the Central Armed Police Forces (General Administration) Bill, 2026 in the Rajya Sabha to regulate the general rules governing the recruitment and conditions of service of 'Group A General Duty Officers' (GAGDO) and other officers in the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs). This Bill provides that 50% of Inspector General posts, a minimum of 67% of Additional Director General posts (ADG), and all Special Director General (SDG) and Director General posts shall be filled by deputation from the Indian Police Service.

Applies across CAPFs

By implication, deputation to the rank of the Deputy Inspector General and below, shall continue to be regulated by the prevailing rules. The Bill also saves any financial benefits granted to the GAGDO (Group A officer of the rank of Assistant Commandant and above) issued before. This Act shall apply to the five CAPFs – Central Reserve Police Force, Border Security Force, Central Industrial Security Force, Indo Tibetan Border Police and Sashastra Seema Bal. While the Bill aims to institutionalise the historical contributions and representation of the IPS in the CAPFs, it is seen by some as an instrument to undo the directions issued by the Supreme Court of India in *Sanjay Prakash and Others vs Union of India and Others* (May 2025).

The Court ruled mainly on two issues; to complete the pending cadre review and undertake the review of service rules in a given time-period; and to progressively reduce the number of posts earmarked for deputation in the CAPFs up to the level of Senior Administrative Grade (SAG) i.e., Inspector General rank, within a period of two years. It is thus clear that the recognition of the CAPFs as Organised Group 'A' Services (OGAS) was subject the provision of deputation of IPS officers to various CAPFs.

> The Central Armed Police Forces (General Administration) Bill, 2026 strengthens service rules and clarifies IPS deputation policy

The Court noted that there are various issues connected with the deployment of CAPFs, including coordination with the State Governments and the State police force. The appointment of IPS officers in each CAPF is vital to maintain the character of each CAPF. This is a policy decision manifest through the service rules of the CAPFs. The question of who shall head these forces was never contentious. It was not even a case that the petitioners' service conditions had worsened since they joined the service.

A 'unifying link'

Most of the senior operational posts in States are held by ADG or SDG rank officers. Therefore, the appointment of IPS officers to the CAPFs at senior ranks is essential for smooth relations with the State forces. Their selection process and training, along with field experience, give them a broader vision and an edge in leading forces whose main aim is to assist or work in tandem with State forces. Those who use the term 'parachuting IPS officers into CAPFs' seem unaware of Sardar Patel's vision, which envisaged the IPS as a unifying link between the Union and the States. The IPS officers have lived up to his dreams for decades, upholding the constitutional mandate.

The Ministry of Home Affairs, in January 2026, modified the empanelment guidelines of IPS officers at the Centre and made a minimum two-year stint at the Centre mandatory for empanelment at the rank of Inspector General. Therefore, the appointment of IPS officers in the Superintendent of Police (SP)/Deputy Inspector General of Police (DIG) ranks in the CAPFs will further cement their camaraderie with the cadre officers.

As far as reducing the posts of deputation is concerned, the Court seems to have ruled on the policy matter which exclusively falls within the domain of the legislature and executive. While the Court clearly stated that the matter of taking IPS officers on deputation is a policy matter and the central government in its wisdom had taken a view that the presence of IPS officers in each CAPFs is vital, it erred in directing the central government to reduce the posts of deputation.

Judiciary's role

The duty of the court is to interpret law. Courts may fill gaps in certain spheres, but they are not to plunge into policy making by adding something. The court is not expected to sit as an appellate authority on an option it feels wiser to. The Court has previously held that 'the wisdom and advisability of the policies are ordinarily not amenable to judicial review unless the policies are contrary to statutory or constitutional provisions or arbitrary or irrational or an abuse of power'.

The Court, in *Gazula Dasaratha Rama Rao vs The State Of Andhra Pradesh & Others* (1960), held that 'the service provisions under ... the Constitution do not enshrine any fundamental right of citizens; they relate to recruitment condition and tenure of service of persons, ... appointed to a Civil Service or to posts in connection with the affairs of the Union or any State'. Rightly so. The Court, *in Indian Ex Servicemen Movement and Ors. Vs. Union of India and Ors.*, held that it did not find any constitutional infirmity in the 'One Rank One Pension' principle.

The service conditions of CAPFs can be enhanced through regular intake and timely cadre reviews. The appointment of IPS officers on deputation to the CAPFs, being a policy matter beyond the scope of adjudication, is rightly being codified, leaving no room for divergent interpretations in the future.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Global silence continues

The President of the U.S. Donald Trump is speaking and acting not like a democratically elected leader of a democratic country, but like an autocratic leader of a medieval country talking about which country he is planning to conquer next (Inside pages, "Trump declares 'Cuba is next', denies losing MAGA support", March 29). The real tragedy of the times is that the rest of the world is almost silent. When Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro was captured by the U.S., ostensibly termed as a law enforcement operation "against an illegitimate leader" by the U.S., only a few countries have either condemned or expressed deep concern. And that was it. The reaction of world leaders has not been much different in the ongoing Iran war. Now, Mr. Trump says "Cuba is next", almost as if it is a football match or some such thing against another country's team. It is high time that the U.N. and sensible world leaders initiate some concrete and collective action to make Mr. Trump to realise that we are living in an era defined by an international order.

Kosaraju Chandramouli,
Hyderabad

American media report

If reports of U.S. business tycoon Elon Musk attending the private conversation between U.S. President Donald Trump and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi are true, it would constitute a serious breach of standard protocols governing such sensitive discussions (Inside Pages, "It was solely a conversation between Trump, Modi", March 29). Since the U.S. has not issued any rebuttal, the Union government needs to clarify what took place.

V. Johan Dhanakumar,
Chennai

A good beginning

Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) won the IPL opener against Sunrisers Hyderabad in Bengaluru on Saturday in style. That it chased the target of 202 runs with six wickets in hand and 26 balls to spare is a case in point. Virat Kohli and Devdutt Padikkal are the main reason for RCB registering a phenomenal win. Of course, RCB's bowlers did their bit well too. All said and done, RCB has started this IPL edition on a good note.

S. Ramakrishnasayee,
Chennai

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the postal address.

How to secure India's supply chains

Anant Goenka
President of the FICCI

India's manufacturing ecosystem is deeply embedded in global supply chains. From energy and fertilizers to electronics and chemicals, several sectors rely heavily on imported raw materials and intermediates. The recent geopolitical development in West Asia has shown how quickly supply disruptions can ripple through the economy, underscoring a stark reality that while global interdependence is beneficial, it also amplifies vulnerability. As the country navigates ongoing supply chain disruptions, the events have reinforced the need for building long-term resilience through reduced import dependence.

Ensuring flow of energy

Energy is the backbone of any economy, powering manufacturing, transport, agriculture and services. India imports about 85% of its crude oil and over 50% of its gas, making it highly vulnerable to geopolitical shocks. Price spikes transmit quickly across sectors, raising input costs across manufacturing; increasing logistics expenses; and even pushing up consumer prices via diesel and fertilizer linkages. It is estimated that every $10 per barrel hike in crude prices can cause a $13-$14 billion rise in the import bill, 30-40 bps rise in consumer inflation (with complete pass through), and could even lower Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth by 0.2-0.3 percentage points. Long-term energy security is, therefore, critical and must be anchored in diversification, domestic capacity, and technological transition.

Accelerating renewable energy is central to reducing import dependence on oil. India's progress towards the target of 500 GW of non-fossil capacity by 2030 is noteworthy. However, resilience requires significant investments in RE storage to manage intermittency. The National Green Hydrogen Mission offers a pathway to decarbonise industries reliant on imported oil and gas.

Even as the country steps up renewable energy adoption, expanding domestic oil and gas exploration is necessary to ensure long-term energy resilience. Strengthening buffers by expanding strategic petroleum reserves can help the country withstand short-term supply disruptions. India has already started to diversify oil import sources, which is a positive step.

Securing food security

Even as India has emerged as a net exporter of several agri-commodities such as cereals and marine products, some of the most critical segments of the food value chain are deeply import-dependent. India's high import dependence on edible oils, pulses and fertilizers is a key concern as any supply disruption can have direct consequences on inflation and rural livelihoods.

Pulses and oilseeds need assured procurement, price support, and region-specific crop diversification. Scaling and accelerating the existing missions on oilseeds can reduce the current import gap, where domestic output meets barely 44% of demand. The government must also work towards buffering and holding strategic reserves for edible oils and pulses to meet any contingency requirements. Fertilizer sector reforms must focus on the diversification of suppliers mix, enhancing the domestic production of phosphatic and potassic fertilizers, and the introduction of alternative bio-fertilizers that can be adopted at scale.

Supply chain risks in manufacturing (raw materials and intermediates) can also have a deep impact. India's imports account for nearly 19% of GDP. Of this, raw materials make up 34%, intermediates 31%, and capital goods 24%. Consumer goods account for just 12%. India dominates downstream manufacturing but is exposed to imports in upstream and midstream inputs such as APIs, electronics, and industrial intermediates, amongst others.

The need for diversification

On the raw material front, copper, lithium, cobalt and other rare earth minerals remain globally concentrated, making India vulnerable given their centrality to electronics, electric mobility, and advanced manufacturing. On intermediates, India imports nearly 65-70% of its pharmaceutical intermediates from China despite being a global leader in generic drug exports. Likewise, with respect to electronic imports, India has a high dependence on semiconductors, display units, and components from East Asia. Limited domestic capability in high-end industrial machinery constrains India's manufacturing competitiveness and reinforces reliance on external ecosystems. These are not easily substitutable inputs. When they are disrupted, production stops.

The first and most critical priority is thus deepening domestic manufacturing in intermediates. While current policy frameworks have largely incentivised final assembly, the next phase must target overall domestic ecosystems such as strengthening the manufacturing of APIs, and semiconductors. Diversification must also continue, with long-term supply agreements and strategic partnerships across regions, including in the markets of Africa and Latin America. Re-engineering of industrial processes can also help reduce import intensity. Encouraging industry to adopt direct conversion technologies, alternative materials, and input-efficient production methods will gradually lower structural vulnerability.

Supply chain resilience cannot be built through isolated interventions. It requires an integrated, forward-looking approach involving government, industry, and global partners.

Supply chain resilience cannot be built through isolated interventions. It requires an integrated, forward-looking approach

A sidetracked railway in Visakhapatnam

The delay in the functioning of a Railway zone has led to anxieties flaring up

STATE OF PLAY

B. Madhu Gopal
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The Visakhapatnam-headquartered DBK Railway executed three prestigious Railway line projects without any time or cost overruns over 50 years ago. Now, even after seven years since Visakhapatnam was chosen as the headquarters of the new South Coast Railway (SCoR) zone, there has hardly been any progress on the ground.

The failure of the Railway Board to issue a Gazette notification on the SCoR so far has created doubts in the minds of the public about the Centre's intentions. Though Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw has stated that the new zone would start "soon," he has remained silent on the issue of the Gazette notification, which is crucial for the zone to start functioning.

The Narendra Modi-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government had announced the creation of the SCoR, with its zonal headquarters in Visakhapatnam, ahead of the general elections in February 2019. After the elections, there were hardly any steps taken to get the ball rolling. An Officer on Special Duty was appointed and a Detailed Project Report submitted, but concrete decisions have been inordinately delayed. Though Mr. Modi had visited Visakhapatnam on a couple of occasions between 2019 and 2024, and had the foundation stone laying ceremony included in his schedule in one of these visits, it was withdrawn at the eleventh hour. Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leaders had then claimed that the operationalisation of the SCoR would benefit the YSR Congress Party without giving any advantage to them. But now the Telugu Desam Party (TDP)-Jana Sena Party (JSP)-BJP alliance government is in power; and apart from laying the foundation stone last year, progress on the Railway zone has been slow. What is stopping the 'double-engine sarkar' from hastening work on the zone?

Off the rails

Interestingly, on the other hand, some BJP leaders, including Union Minister Kishan Reddy from Telangana, have expressed concerns over the injustice done to Visakhapatnam and the north Andhra region by the Bhubaneswar-headquartered East Coast Railway (ECoR) over the last two decades. While this includes the delay in extending highly patronised trains terminating at Visakhapatnam junction to Bhubaneswar, and the failure to start new trains originating from Visakhapatnam, it also has to deal with an issue involving the Waltair divison.

At the time of the creation of the ECoR, in 2003, a large portion of the Waltair division (originating in Andhra) was given away to create the Sambalpur division in Odisha, while the remaining part was merged with the ECoR. At present the Waltair division, under the ECoR, extends over a length of 1,106.44 km, covering three States – mainly Andhra, Odisha and Chhattisgarh.

Even then, as the SCoR was being created with headquarters in Visakhapatnam, Odisha staked claim over the entire Kottavalasa-Kirandul (K-K) line, which is the lifeline of the Waltair division. This is in contrast to the earlier proposal to bifurcate the K-K line.

Andhra Pradesh BJP president P.V.N. Madhav, when he was BJP MLC, had written to the then Railway Minister stating that the revenue from the Waltair Division was more than the combined revenues of Vijayawada, Guntur, and Guntakal divisions put together. He had noted: "We are willing to part with the Odisha portion of the K-K line between Koraput-Kirandul, Kuneru-Theruvali, and Koraput-Rayagada, as they belong to Odisha. But how can the backward regions of Uttarandhra [region in northern Andhra] be transferred to Rayagada Division?" However, the BJP-led NDA government is now in favour of transferring the entire K-K line to the Rayagada division in Odisha to further its political interests in that State.

Delayed progress

The lack of a gazette notification has effectively meant no work happening across any fronts. At a meeting about a decade ago, top officials of the DBK Railway Project recalled that all three major line expansion projects were completed on time because DBK Railway had full powers to take decisions, preventing procedural delays in obtaining sanctions. Now, though a General Manager has been appointed for the SCoR, Railway sources say that without the issuance of the Gazette notification, he has no powers to take major decisions. It is high time that Visakhapatnam –the growth engine of Andhra Pradesh– is given a better deal by the 'double-engine sarkar'.

The rise of temporary teachers in West Bengal

The State has not been able to expand its institutional capacity in line with rising demand

DATA POINT

Arnab Chakrabarti
Anwesha Basu

West Bengal's higher education system is increasingly being defined by an unusual feature: an exceptionally high reliance on temporary teachers. While contractual and ad-hoc faculty are not uncommon across Indian universities, the scale observed in West Bengal is far beyond the national norm. Evidence from the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) reveals that this is not a short-term administrative adjustment, but a persistent structural feature of the system.

Chart 1 captures the magnitude of the issue. Over the past decade, the share of temporary teachers in West Bengal has consistently remained above 15%, far exceeding that of any other major State. In 2021-22, while Rajasthan (1.25%), Tamil Nadu (2.84%), and even Uttar Pradesh (6%) reported relatively modest shares, West Bengal stood at a striking 18%. In absolute terms too, the State leads, with over 13,200 temporary teachers – higher than Karnataka (11,300), which ranks second. The skew is even sharper along gender lines. Temporary appointments account for 22.5% of all female teachers in the State, compared to 15.4% for men. The next highest share of female temporary teachers among major States is just 7.8%.

While the latest data from AISHE are available only up to 2021-22, the insights they reveal are still relevant. Structural features of higher education systems such as institutional capacity, hiring practices, and workforce composition tend to evolve slowly. As such, the trends observed are unlikely to have reversed dramatically in the short span since, and continue to offer valuable insights.

A common explanation for the unusually high share of temporary teachers in West Bengal could be that such reliance stems from a freeze in permanent recruitment. However, data does not support this claim. Growth in permanent teaching positions in West Bengal has fluctuated between 8% and 15% annually – neither stagnant nor unusually low relative to other States (**Chart 2**). Moreover, we see that the growth of temporary and permanent teachers in West Bengal has broadly moved in tandem.

An alternative line of inquiry is whether this pattern reflects a demand-side pressure, specifically whether a higher Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in West Bengal has outpaced the system's ability to expand permanent faculty. However, a comparison of GER across States suggests otherwise. West Bengal's GER (26.3% in 2021-22) is not particularly high; in fact, it lies toward the lower end of the spectrum, with States like Tamil Nadu (47%), and even Rajasthan (28.6%) outperforming by a margin.

The problem, therefore, lies elsewhere – on the supply side of higher education.

Strained numbers

West Bengal has not been able to expand its institutional capacity in line with rising demand. Between 2017-18 and 2020-21, the number of institutions grew by just 10.83%, well below other States with relatively weaker educational infrastructure, such as Rajasthan (23.5%), Madhya Pradesh (21%), and Uttar Pradesh (19%). This limited expansion has resulted in a heavy burden on existing institutions. With roughly 1,100 students per institute, West Bengal ranks second in the country, behind Delhi, and far above most other States.

This strain is further reflected in teaching capacity. The pupil-teacher ratio in the State ranges between 29 and 35 – among the poorest in India (**Chart 3**). Compared to many other major States, the number of permanent faculty per one lakh students is also low in West Bengal (257). These indicators converge on a single conclusion: there are simply not enough institutions or permanent teachers to meet the demand for higher education.

In this context, the proliferation of temporary teachers appears less a policy choice and more a coping mechanism. An excessive reliance on temporary teachers may have a fiscal incentive from the State's perspective in the short run, but it has certain long-term consequences on the health of the higher education system. By design, such positions offer limited job security, lower pay, and little scope for research or professional development. This can adversely affect teaching quality, as instructors juggling multiple appointments may have less time and lower incentive for student engagement or curriculum development. A system that depends heavily on precarious employment risks disincentivising individuals from pursuing academic careers altogether. Moreover, since temporary positions are disproportionately filled by women and early-career academics, existing inequities are deepened.

The implications of this structural imbalance extend beyond the higher education system itself. In recent years, the policy focus of the West Bengal government has increasingly leaned towards cash transfer schemes aimed at immediate welfare gains.

While such interventions help vulnerable households, they cannot be a substitute for long-term investments in human capital.

Addressing the underlying structural constraints – expanding institutional capacity, improving student-teacher ratios, and strengthening the base of permanent faculty – is essential. Without these reforms, the State risks undermining its ability to generate a skilled and productive workforce.

The authors are Assistant Professors, FLAME University. With inputs from Ridhima Mittal, UG2 student, FLAME University.

CHART 1: The share of temporary teachers across select States (2010-11 to 2021-22). Figures in %

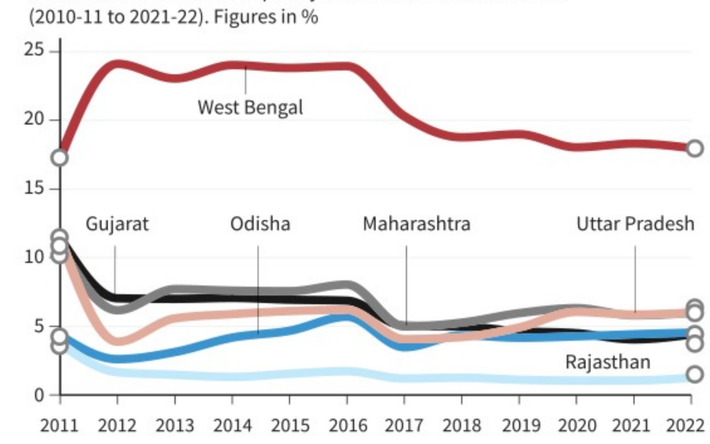


CHART 2: The annual growth (in %) in the number of permanent teachers across States and years

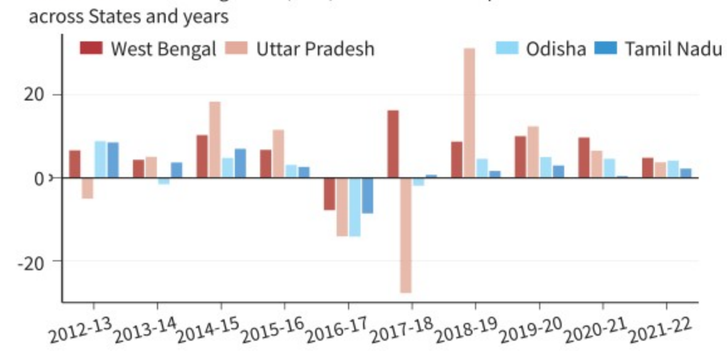
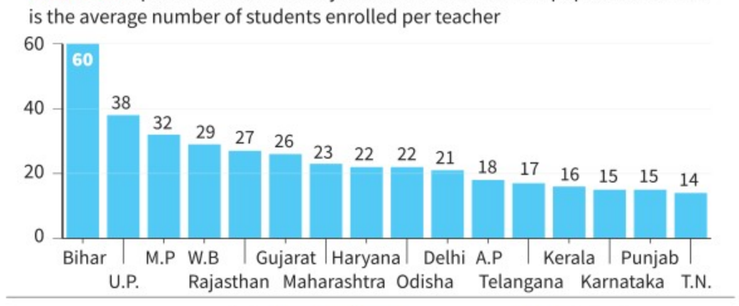


CHART 3: Pupil-teacher ratio in major States in 2020-21. The pupil-teacher ratio is the average number of students enrolled per teacher



FROM THE ARCHIVES
The Hindu.

FIFTY YEARS AGO MARCH 30, 1976

Space dept. posts out of UPSC purview

New Delhi, March 29: Though the Union Public Service Commission is not in favour of excluding from its purview technical and administrative posts, it has finally made an exception in the case of the Department of Space and the Space Commission in "national interest".

The Commission's view had been that certain Ministries and departments had the tendency to seek exemption from the requirements of Article 320 (3) of the Constitution in regard to large categories of posts under them. Several proposals for the exclusion of posts, mainly scientific and technical, had been referred to it, and the Commission had advised against them. It considered that proposals of this nature raised fundamental issues of national importance, the precise impact of which on the role and functions of the Commission, on the standard and quality of public services and on the morale of officers manning these services needed to be clearly understood. As an instance, it has pointed out that the Government had referred to it for reconsideration the proposal for exclusion of technical and administrative posts in the Department of Space and Space Commission from the Commission's purview. While appreciating the fact that the work in the Department and Space Commission was of a highly technical nature, the UPSC said that it had already explained that special arrangements had been made for obtaining the best technical advice for making selections to these posts.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO MARCH 30, 1926

Calcutta commercial institute

Calcutta, March 29: Presiding over the prize distribution ceremony at the Government Commercial Institute, this afternoon, the Hon'ble Mr. J.W.A Bell, President, Bengal Chamber of Commerce, said that in a conservative country, like India, it was always difficult for a comparatively new institution to find its way into public confidence. This Institute filled a want in the educational system of India; but it was desirable in a great industrial country, which India was becoming, that there should be an institution in which education was imparted, along strictly commercial and industrial lines.

From Page One

Iran warns against ground invasion

Egypt's Badr Abdelatty, who was part of the talks with Turkiye's Hakan Fidan, Saudi Arabia's Prince Faisal Bin Farhan, and Pakistan's Ishaq Dar, said the meetings were aimed at opening a "direct dialogue" between the U.S. and Iran.

Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps warned in a statement that it would consider Israeli universities and branches of U.S. universities in the region "legitimate targets" unless offered safety assurances for Iranian universities, state media reported after Israeli strikes hit several universities, including ones claimed to have been used by the Islamic Republic for nuclear research and development.

Israel announced waves of incoming strikes from Iran on Sunday and explosions could be heard throughout Tehran.

Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif earlier said he and Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian had held "extensive discussions" on the regional hostilities. Officials said 20 more Pakistani-flagged ships were allowed to transit the Strait of Hormuz late on Saturday as Iran eased restrictions over the critical waterway.

IRGC also said that they launched strikes on aluminium plants in Bahrain and the UAE over the weekend, targeting what they described as industries linked to the U.S. military. It added that the strikes were retaliation for a U.S.-Israeli attack on Iranian industrial infrastructure launched from bases in Gulf states. Aluminium Bahrain, one of the world's largest aluminium producers, said two employees were wounded in the strike.

(With AFP inputs)

BJP is the 'A team' of Kerala, says PM Modi

The Prime Minister said that for decades, Kerala had been trapped between the fronts that alternated in power without delivering progress. "If one was communal, the other was overly communal; if one was corrupt, the other was excessively corrupt. Both UDF and LDF have cheated the public by relying on vote-bank politics," he said.

The Prime Minister accused the LDF government of plunging Kerala into a debt of ₹5 lakh crore. "Kerala's debt has tripled in the last 10 years, with the money going into the pockets of the LDF," he said. If the NDA comes to power, we will recover the funds and use them for the welfare of the public, Mr. Modi said.

He said both the Congress and the Left shared a long history of misgovernance, pointing to the Left's record in Bengal and Tripura and the Congress's performance nationwide. He stressed the BJP's focus on a women-led development model, highlighting initiatives across several sectors, including health, and citing the passage of the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam law. "Under the NDA, girls from disadvantaged backgrounds will be empowered to achieve new heights," he said, contrasting this with Congress leaders, whom he described as obstacles to women's progress.

Acknowledging the hard work of Palakkad's paddy farmers, Mr. Modi said that only the BJP can provide effective support to the farming community. "Instead of helping, the State government is trapping farmers in debt," he said, adding that an NDA government in Kerala would end their woes, a promise he called "Modi's guarantee".

He promised to expose the corruption involving the LDF and the UDF if the BJP comes to power in Kerala. "Both of them are engaged in corruption and looting, but they never expose each other. The BJP will ensure justice for the people by investigating and revealing the LDF-UDF misdeeds," he said.

'I am the candidate in all the seats', says Mamata

This was the first time during the 2026 election campaign that Ms. Banerjee was projecting herself as candidate in all the 294 Assembly seats. Almost 10 years ago, ahead of the 2016 Assembly polls, when several Trinamool leaders, including Ministers, were caught on camera accepting cash for party funds in the Narada sting videos, the Chief Minister on whom the campaign of the party is centred, had made similar remarks that she was the candidate in all seats.

The 2021 Assembly polls in West Bengal, where the Trinamool Congress was successfully able to resist the attack by the Bharatiya Janata Party, was built on the campaign "*Banglar Nijer Mein Ki Chai* [Bengal wants its own daughter]."

The Trinamool Congress has fielded candidates in 291 out of the 294 seats and left the three seats to its ally, Bharatiya Gorkha Prajatantrik Morcha. Ms. Banerjee is contesting from Bhabanipur.

During her speech at Manbazar in Purulia, Ms. Banerjee retorted to the remarks made by Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday where he had said that the Chief Minister always played the 'victim card'. "Sometimes she talks about her injury; sometimes she abuses the Election Commission. But the people of West Bengal now understand her victim card politics very well," he had said.

The Chief Minister said she had repeatedly returned from the brink of death and wondered if the BJP leaders want her dead. "I have repeatedly returned from the brink of death. Go and check the report of the doctor... Did you deliberately injure my leg during the 2021 elections? Are you planning to kill me?" Ms. Banerjee said.

Challenging times, says PM on West Asia crisis

Modi warns against politicising the issue, says the region is a major centre of India's energy needs, and due to the ongoing war, a 'crisis' regarding petrol and diesel is emerging around the world

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday noted that the situation in West Asia had created "challenging times" and called for those "politicising" the issue to refrain from doing so. He cautioned Indians against believing rumours related to the crisis.

Speaking during his monthly *Mann Ki Baat* address, the Prime Minister said that following the COVID-19 pandemic, it was expected that the world would move forward on a path of renewed progress.

"However, situations of war and conflict have continuously kept arising in different parts of the world," he said.

"At present, a fierce war has been going on in our neighbourhood for a month. Millions of our family members, near and dear ones, live in these countries, especially working in the Gulf countries."

> I would once again urge all my countrymen that we must unitedly overcome this challenge. Those who are politicising even this issue should refrain from doing so. This is a matter concerning the interests of 140 crore countrymen; there is no place for self-serving politics.
>
> **NARENDRA MODI**
> Prime Minister

Deeply grateful

"I am deeply grateful to the Gulf countries for providing all kinds of assistance to more than one crore Indians there," he added.

Mr. Modi noted that the West Asian region is a major centre of India's energy needs, and due to the ongoing war, a "crisis" regarding petrol and diesel is emerging around the world.

"These certainly are challenging times," he said. "I would once again urge all my countrymen that we must unitedly overcome this challenge. Those who are politicising even this issue should refrain from doing so. This is a matter concerning the interests of 140 crore countrymen; there is no place for self-serving politics."

"Therefore, those who are spreading rumours are causing a major harm to the country," Mr. Modi added. "I would also appeal to all citizens to remain vigilant and not be misled by rumours. Trust only the continuous information provided by the government and take action based only on that."

Key initiatives

During his address, the Prime Minister also took note of various initiatives aimed at nation-building. One such initiative was the Gyan Bharatam Survey aimed at collecting information about manuscripts across the country.

"If you have a manuscript or information about it, do share its image on the Gyan Bharatam App," Mr. Modi said, adding, "Information related to each entry is being verified before it is recorded. I am glad that thousands of manuscripts have been shared so far."

Another initiative he highlighted was MY Bharat Budget Quest. "It aims to connect the youth across the country with the Budget process and policymaking," the Prime Minister said. "Nearly 12 lakh youth from across the country participated in the quiz."

Sports achievements

The Prime Minister also devoted a section of his address to India's sporting achievements in the recent past.

"When India achieved a historic victory in the T20 World Cup, a wave of joy swept across the country," he said. "We are all very proud of our team's thumping success."

"Late last month, a thrilling match was witnessed in Hubli, Karnataka. By winning this match, the Jammu and Kashmir cricket team secured for themselves the Ranji Trophy," he said. He remarked that this success for Jammu and Kashmir will encourage many young people to take up sports, adding that the people of J&K have a "tremendous passion" for sports. "I am glad that it is now becoming a hub for major sporting events," Mr. Modi said. "I hope this winning streak of J&K sports persons continues in the future."

'Global acceptance of Pakistan a failure of Indian foreign policy'

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Jairam Ramesh

In the context of Pakistan mediating between the United States and Iran to resolve the ongoing conflict in West Asia, Jairam Ramesh, general secretary (communications) of the Congress, on Sunday criticised the Bharatiya Janata Party-led government's foreign policy, alleging that Pakistan's renewed global acceptance reflected failures in India's diplomatic engagement and narrative management.

In a post on X, Mr. Ramesh described Pakistan as a country where "democracy is a farce," its economy "a basket case dependent on the IMF, China, and Saudi Arabia," and one regarded as "a haven for terrorists" whose activities have targeted countries across the world.

Mr. Ramesh argued that despite Pakistan's isolation after the 2008 Mumbai attacks, it had recently regained international acceptance. Citing External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar's description of Pakistan as a "*dalal*", he said this shift underscored what he termed the "colossal failure" of the Modi government's foreign policy.

He added that U.S. President Donald Trump, whom Prime Minister Narendra Modi has publicly called a "good friend", had also contributed to Pakistan's current standing. Mr. Ramesh questioned why the Prime Minister, despite showcasing close ties with Washington at events such as the *Howdy Modi* rally in Houston in 2019 and the Namaste Trump event in Ahmedabad in 2020, had "allowed this to happen".

Mr. Ramesh alleged that the government's attempts to curry favour with the U.S., including what he called a "betrayal of India's farmers" through a trade deal granting American agricultural interests unprecedented market access, had yielded no diplomatic leverage.

Mr. Ramesh said the "unravelling" of what he described as a "heavily personality driven foreign policy" had exposed the "*Vishwaguru*" persona as a "Vishwaphoney".

Maoist killed in Sukma encounter, say police

The Hindu Bureau
RAIPUR

A Maoist carrying a reward of ₹5 lakh has been killed in an ongoing encounter with the security forces in Sukma district of Chhattisgarh, the police said on Sunday.

Sukma Superintendent of Police Kiran Chavan said that on the basis of intelligence about the presence of Maoists in the hills in the Polampalli police station limits, a team of personnel from the Sukma District Reserve Guard (DRG) started a search operation.

During the operation, intermittent firing took place between the DRG team and the Maoists on Sunday morning, said Mr. Chavan, adding that on searching the encounter site, the body of one male Maoist was recovered.

The Maoist was later identified as Muchaki Kailash, who was wanted for civilian killings, attacks, and conspiracy to carry out IED blasts and was carrying a reward of ₹5 lakh, said Mr. Chavan.

Anti-Maoist campaign saw continuity across regimes, says former official

Vijaita Singh
NEW DELHI

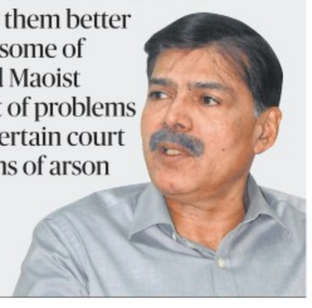
Both Congress-led and BJP-led governments at the Centre pursued a broadly consistent approach in handling the Maoist problem in the country, said K. Vijay Kumar, former senior security adviser to the Union Home Ministry, who worked with administrations of both parties.

He said that the years 2006 to 2009 were the most difficult and the gains made over the years found a resolute push in the past two years when Home Minister Amit Shah set a deadline of March 31, 2026, to eradicate left-wing extremism from the country.

Mr. Kumar, who is a retired 1975-batch Indian Police Service (IPS) officer and former Director-General of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), said in an interview with *The Hindu* that former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had rightly recognised Maoism as the foremost internal security threat.

After the 2010 killing of 76 security personnel in Chhattisgarh, former Home Minister P. Chidambaram pushed through centrally assisted funding for counter-Maoist operations, Mr. Kumar, who resigned from the Home Ministry in 2022, said. Around 200 district collectors were given discretionary funds to fortify police stations and improve mobility in remote areas, he said. "In Bijapur, the collector procured 30 to 40 vehicles to address the lack of transport, which were never ambushed as they directly benefited local communities," he said.

> Both of us played a direct role in facilitating the training of 3,000-4,000 special forces personnel. It was done in a discreet way, giving them better arms and training. And some of them were surrendered Maoist cadres. There were a lot of problems earlier, stigmatised by certain court observations...allegations of arson and looting
>
> **K. VIJAY KUMAR**
> Former security adviser to the Ministry of Home Affairs



He said in 2014-15, under National Security Adviser Ajit Doval, a push was given to train local tribal youth in Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand. "Both of us played a direct role in facilitating the training of 3,000- 4,000 special forces personnel. It was done in a discreet way, giving them better arms and training. And some of them were surrendered Maoist cadres. There were a lot of problems earlier, stigmatised by certain court observations... allegations of arson and looting," Mr. Kumar said.

He said that 99.99% of allegations of human rights violation against security forces were false and part of "psy ops" to demoralise the armed personnel.

He said after the Dantewada incident, the CRPF was made the "patch force" which could operate across States and beyond police jurisdictions, and in 2011, it got a separate intelligence wing. "Cash was disbursed through helicopters. There was no sign of governance in many places. CRPF camps acted as the single point of the government," he said.

He added that the "children wing" of the Maoists were the most ruthless. "The child cadres are good in observation, and they can be heartless. Similarly, the woman cadres were better trained than the men," the former CRPF Director-General said.

As operations expanded steadily, he said, training, equipment, integration, and coordination improved year after year. "That is the only difference I see – greater vigour over time – but the continuity in approach remained," he said, adding that he himself was part of that continuity across governments.

JD(U) leaders meet Nitish as time closes in on resignation

Amit Bhelari
PATNA

With just a day left for Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar to resign from the Legislative Council, senior leaders of his Janata Dal (United) party rushed to his official residence in Patna to hold closed-door meetings, amid pleas from a section of the party for Mr. Kumar to remain in Bihar, and a lack of clarity regarding his successor.

Mr. Kumar secured a Rajya Sabha seat through an election held on March 16. He is required to resign from his seat in the State legislature – and step down from the Chief Minister's post – within 14 days of being elected to Parliament. Bihar Assembly Speaker Prem Kumar had noted that Mr. Kumar had time to resign till March 30.

The leaders who met with Mr. Kumar at his official residence on Sunday included Union Minister Rajiv Ranjan Singh, State Minister Vijay Kumar Choudhary, State Minister Ashok Choudhary, JD(U) working president Sanjay Jha, and several MLAs.

Sources said that during the meeting, several leaders suggested that Mr. Kumar should not leave Bihar politics. However, after the meeting, Mokama MLA Anant Singh said though he had also urged him to stay back, Mr. Kumar had made his decision, and was likely to resign on March 30. "I urged him not to resign but he did not listen to me," Mr. Singh said.

Race for CM's post

In the race to succeed Mr. Kumar, the front runner is BJP leader and Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary.

However, several JD(U) leaders have said that Mr. Nitish Kumar's son, Nishant Kumar, who recently entered active politics, should take over the post.

Heavyweights among 284 Congress candidates in Bengal

Shrabana Chatterjee
Shiv Sahay Singh
KOLKATA

The Congress on Sunday fielded several heavyweights for the West Bengal Assembly election 2026, including former party leader in the Lok Sabha Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury and former Rajya Sabha member Mausam Benazir Noor.

The party, which has decided to contest all the 294 seats in the State, announced candidates for 284 of them, effectively ending a decade-long electoral understanding with the Communist Party of India (Marxist)-led Left Front, which has allied with the Indian Secular Front (ISF).

Mr. Chowdhury, a five-term Congress MP from Behrampore, will contest the Behrampore Assembly seat in Murshidabad district.

Ms. Noor, a former Trinamool Congress MP who made a comeback to the Congress in January 2026, has been fielded from the Malatipur constituency. She hails from the family of Congress leader and former Union Minister A.B.A. Ghani Khan Chowdhury.

The nomination of Mr. Chowdhury and Ms. Noor has made the contest interesting in central West Bengal, particularly in Malda and Murshidabad districts, where the Trinamool Congress is facing pressure from regional players like Humayun Kabir's Aam Janata Unnayan Party (AJUP). In the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, Trinamool Congress candidate Yusuf Pathan defeated Mr. Chowdhury in Behrampore by a margin of 70,000 votes. The 2026 Assembly election is an opportunity for Mr. Chowdhury to re-establish his political dominance in the region.

Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury

The candidates include Rohan Mitra, son of former MP and popular Congress leader Somen Mitra. A general secretary of the State unit, he will contest from Ballygunge.

Former MLA Ali Imran Ramz, popularly known as Victor, has been fielded from Uttar Dinajpur's Chakulia. Mr. Ramz was earlier associated with the All India Forward Bloc.

The party has fielded youth leader Ashutosh Chatterjee from Rashbehari. Congress South Kolkata district president Pradeep Prasad will contest from Bhabanipur, where Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and Suvendu Adhikari are in the fray.

Polling for 152 seats will be held in the first phase on April 23, with nominations beginning on Monday. The second and final phase of polling will be held on April 29.

ASSEMBLY POLLS

Fast justice for Zubeen among 5 Cong. guarantees

Fast justice for Zubeen Garg, the late cultural icon, was among five guarantees the Congress rolled out for poll-bound Assam on Sunday.

Addressing an election rally at Nowboicha in Assam's Lakhimpur district, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge promised justice for Garg within 100 days if voted to power. "We will find out who murdered him and present the findings in the specified time," he said, insisting the Congress guarantees were unconditional, unlike BJP's.

Mr. Kharge said Congress would provide ₹50,000 to women to start or grow businesses, apart from monthly cash transfers, and ₹1,250 as a pension to senior citizens. The other guarantees are ₹25 lakh cashless health cover for every family and land rights for 10 lakh indigenous people.

Mallikarjun Kharge addressing an election rally at Nowboicha in Lakhimpur district. PTI

'BJP, AJUP are seeking votes in religion's name'

Senior Trinamool Congress leader Abhishek Banerjee on Sunday accused the BJP and Humayun Kabir's Aam Janata Unnayan Party of seeking votes in the name of religion while ignoring basic issues such as livelihood and food.

Addressing a rally in support of the Trinamool candidate in the Naoda Assembly constituency in Murshidabad, the party national general secretary alleged that while the BJP was doing "temple politics", Mr. Kabir was indulging in "masjid politics", neglecting issues such as development and employment.

"In Murshidabad, while BJP is conspiring to foment riots during Ram Navami processions, Kabir is misleading people in the name of laying the foundation stone of mosque named after Babri Masjid," he said. PTI

> We do not form governments for infiltrators. Only the people of Assam and the country have rights here. We will protect mothers and sisters of Assam
>
> **NITIN NABIN**
> BJP chief

EC suspends 3 CAPF personnel over viral video

The Election Commission suspended three Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) personnel after a video went viral showing them playing carrom inside a Trinamool Congress office at Suri in West Bengal's Birbhum, a senior official said on Sunday. A departmental inquiry has been ordered, he said. PTI

> Congress helped BJP win in Thiruvananthapuram Corporation, while the BJP supported the Congress in Kollam Corporation
>
> **M.A. BABY**
> CPI(M) general secretary

Himanta Biswa Sarma at a rally in Karbi Anglong ahead of Assam Assembly election, on Sunday. ANI

Bongaigaon's open secret: BJP cadres back party rebel over AGP candidate

Abhinay Lakshman
BONGAIGAON

On a rainy Friday morning, the field at the local secondary school in Bongaigaon town is being prepared for a campaign meeting of Diptimayee Choudhury, MLA of the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), a party that emerged out of the Assam agitation. But there are barely any flags of the AGP's ally, the Bharatiya Janata Party, at the meeting venue, though Union Minister and BJP leader Sarbananda Sonowal was scheduled to speak for Ms. Choudhury.

The Bongaigaon Assembly constituency, part of the Barpeta Lok Sabha constituency, the region known as one of the starting points of the Assam agitation, goes to the polls on April 9, along with the rest of Assam. The ruling National Democratic Alliance has allocated the seat to the AGP, which has held it for the past 40 years. However, even as BJP workers campaign for Ms. Choudhury, a section of saffron party cadres has also been supporting her rival, Chakradhar Das, a former BJP leader now contesting as an Independent candidate after being denied ticket.

Mr. Das was among the nine BJP members the party expelled on Friday, including two contesting as Independents in the neighbouring Barpeta constituency.

'A good chance as well'

Later that day, as the BJP's district leadership met Ms. Choudhury at the party office in Bongaigaon town, workers from both the parties outside spoke of Mr. Das having a "good chance as well".

Parikshit Ray, once an AGP loyalist but now with the BJP, said, "He [Mr. Das] is secretly fighting under the BJP. He has done so much work for the people here. I have even helped him arrange a couple of public meetings in areas I am responsible for in the past couple of days. Even if he wins, it is going to benefit the people of Bongaigaon."

A section of party workers speaks of "nepotism" in having Ms. Choudhury contest the seat, citing the fact that she is the wife of Phani Bhushan Choudhury, Barpeta MP. He had held the Bongaigaon Assembly seat consistently from the 1980s till 2024, when he was elected to the Lok Sabha. In the byelection that followed, Ms. Choudhury won by nearly 35,000 votes, with a turnout of about 1.42 lakh. During the 2021 Assembly election, the constituency had around 1.76 lakh voters.

In the New Bongaigaon railway colony, where a large number of Bengali Hindus and Muslims live, posters of Mr. Das from the days he was seeking BJP ticket still hang on lamp posts.

Abdul Khaleque, a 50-year-old pan-shop owner who has lived all his life in Bongaigaon, said, "We don't concern ourselves too much. We just go and vote on the polling day. What can we say when the Chief Minister says things like, 'Trouble the *miyas* [a pejorative for Muslims with roots in Bangladesh] as much as you can'."

While Muslims are a minority in the constituency, the majority population comprises Koch Rajbongshis and Bengali Hindus, many of whom are categorised as Other Backward Class.

Though the Himanta Biswa Sarma Cabinet last year cleared a proposal to include the Koch Rajbongshis on the Scheduled Tribes list, a long-standing demand of the community, the issue has not featured prominently in the NDA's campaign strategy.

'A double-engine govt. will de-risk people from political feuds hurting development'

If a State government has '24x7 animosity towards the Centre, the people will suffer', says Kerala BJP president Rajeev Chandrasekhar; calling the party's performance in the 2025 local body elections in the State a 'big jump forward', he slams 'fake narratives' against the BJP among minorities

INTERVIEW

Rajeev Chandrasekhar

S.R. Praveen
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Rajeev Chandrasekhar, the Bharatiya Janata Party's Kerala unit president, has been leading the party's charge to make a dent in the Left Democratic Front-United Democratic Front duopoly in the State. He has his task cut out in the Nemom constituency, where he contests against incumbent MLA and General Education Minister V. Sivankutty of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and former Congress MLA K.S. Sabarinadhan. Edited excerpts from an interview:

BJP had a major breakthrough when it won the Thiruvananthapuram Corporation in the local body elections in 2025. But at the same time, the party only had a total vote share of 14.76% across Kerala, compared with nearly 20% in the 2024 Lok Sabha election. Are you a bit worried ahead of the Assembly election?

Local body elections are typically not fought along party lines. For us, the local body polls marked a big jump forward. We fielded almost 22,000 candidates, much more than before. The vote share may be at variance with the Lok Sabha election. But the seats that we got spanned the entire State. Earlier, we were restricted to certain pockets around Palakkad and Thiruvananthapuram or Thrissur. One of the regions where we had a major loss in votes was Thrissur. That had a lot to do with candidate selection and mistakes in campaign management, due to which we went from 40% in Lok Sabha [polls] to 20% in local body elections in the district. So if you take that one aberration out, we did extremely well.

You have been carrying out an aggressive outreach towards minority communities – both Muslim and Christian. Do you think you can overcome the apprehensions of these communities, whether it be the issues faced by Muslims or the attacks on nuns and churches in some BJP-ruled States?

Thirty years of fake narratives about the BJP have been force-fed to the minorities, that we are communal and we care only about the Hindus. During the 2024 Lok Sabha election campaign in Pozhiyoor in Thiruvananthapuram, an old lady told me, "I am ready to support you, but you should tell your people not to burn our churches." After I became the party president, we have made it a point to go and meet Malayalis across

NIRMAL HARINDRAN

the State to share our developmental vision and reassure them that we will not harm anyone. Regarding incidents in the North, neither I nor the BJP can speak for all 140 crore Indians, or for all Hindus. If there are crazy individuals out there, who take law into their own hands, the laws of those States must be enforced. I have given an assurance that whenever there is a Malayali in trouble, you can count on me.

Most of these attacks are allegedly carried out by the Bajrang Dal and Vishva Hindu Parishad. Do you think their actions are detrimental to the BJP's chances in Kerala?

I cannot speak for them. In Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Jharkhand, there are anti-conversion laws being passed even by Congress governments, because they consider that it is a huge threat to the indigenous communities. Congress MPs from Kerala go to Chhattisgarh for photo-ops with nuns, but not a single local Congressman participates. They will not, because of the dynamics there.

The BJP is placing itself as an alternative to the LDF and the UDF. The LDF and the UDF have criticised the BJP-led Union government on disaster relief funds for Kerala, particularly after the 2018 floods or the landslide in Wayanad. Do you think these allegations will affect your prospects?

When a government is not able to deliver, they will find somebody to blame, which is what they are doing against the Centre. They have been unable to prove in the Supreme Court that the Centre has been unfair to the State. When the State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF) balance shows so much money, on what account can the Centre give more?

But doesn't the Centre provide special packages usually when such disasters happen in BJP-ruled States?

Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, every rupee has to be properly accounted for. For instance, when there is a disaster in Himachal Pradesh, it will have to give accounts of where its SDRF money is. Only then can it make the claim for additional top-up funds. That the Kerala government is not ready to do.

On that note, what do you think of the concept of 'double-engine government' of the BJP at the Centre and the State?

In a federal democracy, if you have a State government which has 24x7 animosity towards the Centre, the people of the State will suffer. Double-engine government means there is an agreement around basic problems that need to be solved. In some cases, even when the government is not of the ruling party at the Centre, effective cooperation is possible. For instance, it had worked for Naveen Patnaik's government in Odisha.

But in Odisha too, you ran a campaign for a 'double-engine government'. So, does it also imply that you will not benefit unless it is a BJP government in the State?

No. Rather the opposite. Double-engine government de-risks the people from any political conflict coming in the way of their development.

The BJP's major allegation is that the LDF government has failed the State across all sectors. However, the Union government's own agencies such as the NITI Aayog have given Kerala high rankings in health and education in the past 10 years. The Ease of Doing Business (EoDB) rankings had also improved from 28 to 1. How do you explain this contradiction?

It is not a contradiction at all. The metric of EoDB is not the same as attracting investments or creating jobs. Kerala today has the highest unemployment in India. EoDB is a sample survey focused on the businesses already in Kerala, not on those outside looking to invest. So, when there is little business activity in Kerala, you are only sampling what is already here.

Both the LDF and the UDF are accusing each other of having a deal with the BJP. How do you view these allegations? Whom do you consider to be the main opponent among the two?

At one level, it is laughable. I must also thank them for accepting that the BJP is the 'A-team' as both of them accuse each other of being the 'B-team' of the BJP. It is bizarre for two parties who are in a formal political alliance in every other State to be alleging this.

The deal allegation is a desperate attempt to consolidate Muslim votes.

Vijay follows in the footsteps of Tamil Nadu politicians with a penchant for dual contests

D. Suresh Kumar
CHENNAI

When actor-politician C. Joseph Vijay announced on Sunday that he would contest his first Assembly election from two urban constituencies – Perambur in Chennai and Tiruchi East – he was following an established precedent in Tamil Nadu politics, of leaders who enter the fray simultaneously from two Assembly constituencies, though few debutants adopt such a strategy.

Mr. Vijay has not cited any specific reason for his decision and remains inaccessible to the media. His fledgling Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam is making its electoral debut in the 2026 Assembly poll.

In 1991, J. Jayalalitha (as her name was spelt then), an actor-turned-politician and political heir of former Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran, initially filed her nomination from Kangeyam in the then-Periyar district. This was her second Assembly election, having earlier won from Bodinayakanur in 1989 while leading a faction of the AIADMK.

Giant leap: TVK chief and actor Vijay is set to contest his first Assembly election from Perambur in Chennai and Tiruchi East. ANI

On April 18, 1991, she announced that she would also contest from Bargur in Dharmapuri district. Responding to questions, Jayalalitha clarified that the move was not due to fear of defeat. "I will win from any constituency as I am sure of the people's support. But some crank has issued a statement that he will commit suicide after filing nomination in my constituency in order to countermand the election. The second nomination is just for safety's sake," she said, according to *The Hindu* archives. The AIADMK was then allied with the Congress.

A month later, former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated during an election rally in Sriperumbudur. When elections were eventually held, a massive sympathy wave resulted in a landslide victory for Jayalalitha's alliance. She won both seats and later vacated Kangeyam. However, in 1996, she was defeated in Bargur amid a strong anti-corruption wave.

In 2001, Jayalalithaa surprised many by filing nominations from four constituencies – Bargur, Bhuvanagiri, Andipatti, and Krishnagiri – despite the Representation of the People Act allowing candidates to contest from only two seats. She was also facing disqualification due to convictions in corruption cases. Her decision to file from four constituencies was widely seen as an attempt to shift public focus away from her legal troubles.

Dual contest, dual loss

In the same election, Puthiya Tamilagam leader K. Krishnasamy contested from two reserved constituencies – Ottapidaram, where he was the sitting MLA, and Valparai. However, his party, which had been allotted 10 seats by the DMK, failed to win any of them, and he himself lost in both constituencies.

A year later, during byelections in three constituencies, former DMK MLA Chengai Sivam filed nominations in all three as an Independent candidate. Strangely, while his papers were rejected in Acharapakkam (Reserved), the Returning Officer at Saidapet accepted it. In Vaniyambadi, the Returning Officer initially announced that Mr. Sivam's nomination was rejected, but later said it would be re-scrutinised.

Interestingly, in 1980, M.G. Ramachandran and fellow actor-politician S.S. Rajendran, both formerly of the DMK, filed nominations from the same two constituencies – Andipatti and Madurai West – on AIADMK ticket. Eventually, MGR withdrew from Andipatti and the SSR from Madurai West, and both went on to win their respective seats.

Amit Shah promises to introduce UCC in Assam

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday said the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) would be introduced in Assam if the BJP forms the government for the third straight term.

Addressing a rally in western Assam's Tihu, he said the UCC would have a provision to ban polygamy. "The move is aimed at bringing uniformity in civil laws and strengthening social reforms in Assam," he added.

Uttarakhand was the first State to pass and implement the UCC in 2025. Gujarat passed a Bill in March to implement the UCC. The Himanta Biswa Sarma-led Assam government had earlier passed the Assam Prohibition of Polygamy Bill in November 2025, seeking to criminalise the practice of having more than one spouse simultaneously.

INBRIEF

31 arrested for Ram Navami clashes in Bengal district

Two days after clashes during Ram Navami processions, the situation in the Jangipur area in Murshidabad district of West Bengal is now peaceful, police sources said. Prohibitory orders have been imposed under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita. The police said 31 people had been arrested and 21 were injured in the clashes. "The situation is now peaceful. We are analysing CCTV footage to identify more people and arrest them," a senior police official told *The Hindu* on Sunday. Clashes broke out on March 27 during a Ram Navami rally in the Raghunathganj area. Tensions escalated as stone throwing and arson were reported.

BJD MP quits panel over remarks against Biju Patnaik

Biju Janata Dal Rajya Sabha member Sasmit Patra on Saturday resigned from the Parliamentary Standing Committee on IT and Communications, protesting against chairperson Nishikant Dubey's remarks against Biju Patnaik. Mr. Dubey on Friday alleged that the former Odisha Chief Minister (Biju Patnaik) was a "link" between the U.S. government, the CIA, and Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. He further alleged that Patnaik provided patronage to the Charbatia air base in Odisha, which was used by the U.S. Mr. Patra said he was attempting to distort history and malign a "revered leader" for political gains.

Despite assurance from Centre, MGNREGS workers denied work

From Bihar to Rajasthan, thousands of rural workers say work has been halted; as the Centre continues talks with the States on the VB-G RAM G Act, some district officials say they have been directed not to start new work under the old scheme

Sobhana K. Nair
NEW DELHI

Hold on: The scheme under the VB-G RAM G Act, 2025 is yet to be rolled out. MOORTHY G.

For the past 87 days, MGNREGS workers have been protesting at the Muzaffarpur district headquarters in Bihar. The Union government had assured them that until the Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB-G RAM G) Act, 2025, passed by Parliament in December, is rolled out, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) will continue unchanged. But on the ground, workers say the story is very different.

The protest in Muzaffarpur began on January 2. Nearly 12,000 workers in the district have not received work for the past three or four months – even before the new rural employment law was introduced.

Uncertainty continues

There is no clarity on when the new scheme under the VB-G RAM G Act will be implemented on the ground, as the Centre is still holding talks with the States to establish the necessary framework.

"Usually, no work is given during the rain. We waited for the monsoon to end, then for the waterlogged areas to drain. By December, the MGNREGA season normally begins. But despite repeated demand, no work has been provided. This is a blatant violation of the law," said Sanjay Sahni of MGNREGA Watch-Bihar, an organisation working with rural workers. Facing repeated rejections, around 16,000 workers – most of them women – gathered at the district headquarters to demand work. A delegation also travelled to Delhi on March 25 to meet senior officials in the Rural Development Ministry.

"The district officials claim they have instructions not to start any new work. But the Ministry officials insist that no such order exists," Mr. Sahni said. He wonders whether it is lack of information or whether there is an informal signal from the Centre to stop all work under the MGNREGS.

Ground reality

In Dungarpur district of Rajasthan, similar complaints have emerged. At Balwarha panchayat, around 40 women workers arrived on March 23 to complete paperwork for April's work cycle. Panchayat officials asked them to return later, citing a lack of clarity. On Saturday, they were told that the MGNREGS had been discontinued and no further work would be available under the scheme.

At Padarmarhi Mewarha panchayat, nearly 30 women workers sat for four hours last Friday, demanding work for the first week of April. Local officials initially claimed that directions had been issued not to start new MGNREGS works. After the women refused to leave, their applications were eventually accepted, but uncertainty continues whether any work will actually be assigned.

"For each household, MGNREGA work brings in about ₹25,000 to ₹28,000 annually. In some women-led households, MGNREGA and government pensions are the only sources of income," said Madhulika of the Rajasthan Asangathit Mazdoor Union.

"There are no formal orders. The VB-G RAM G Act clearly states that until it is implemented, MGNREGA will continue. But on the ground, we are being told otherwise," she said.

Four killed as NSCN cadres open fire on compatriots

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

Members of the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (NSCN) allegedly killed four compatriots in Manipur's Kamjong district over what is seen as a clash of business interests.

The NSCN was formerly known as the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah).

According to a statement issued by the Eastern Flank of the NSCN, members of the outfit's Wung Region ambushed and killed four of its soldiers while they were returning from "monitoring timber and other business activities" along the India-Myanmar border. The incident happened on the night of March 28.

The Wung Region refers to the Ukhrul district, adjoining Kamjong. The Eastern Flank comprises a stretch along the Sagaing Region and Chin State of Myanmar.

The statement, signed by "Lt. Gen." A. Raman, named two "Second Lieutenants" of the Wung Region as the leaders of the assailants, who fired indiscriminately after declaring that they had orders to shoot.

Curb unauthorised expenditure on projects, Railways directs officials

S. Vijay Kumar
CHENNAI

Expressing serious concern over the increasing instances of unauthorised expenditure running to thousands of crores of rupees, the Indian Railways has called for urgent measures to enforce financial discipline in the system.

The Railway Board has directed the General Managers of all Zonal Railways, Production Units, and others to initiate effective measures to curb the practice of incurring unsanctioned expenses in the execution of projects and subsequently getting the same approved by the competent authority.

Pointing out that the cases of unauthorised expenditure had increased in the recent past, the Railway Board, in a note issued on March 27, said the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) had highlighted the issue in various audit reports and the matter had now been taken up by Public Accounts Committee for review.

Top officials were told to ensure that unsanctioned expenditure does not become a norm.

Financial propriety

"If expenditure is incurred beyond the sanctioned cost and the estimate is put up for approval on post facto basis, scrutiny of estimate by competent authority gets by-passed and only option left is to sanction it as a fait accompli. This practice is against the spirit of financial propriety," the Railway Board said.

The Union government had put various restrictions or limits on the Railway Ministry for sanctioning estimates in respect of variation, cost, and so on. The practice of incurring expenditure beyond the sanctioned cost may exceed such restrictions and violate the guidelines of the Finance Ministry and attract criticism in audit reports.

The CAG had repeatedly raised the issue of incurring expenditure beyond the sanctioned cost. Unsanctioned expenditure meant incurring expenditure on unsanctioned scope or items, which was not a judicious decision, the note said.

"As soon as it becomes apparent that the expenditure on a work or project is likely to exceed the amount provided thereof in the detailed estimate or construction estimate, a revised estimate should be prepared and submitted for the sanction of the competent authority," the Railway Board said, instructing the top officials to put in place a system to ensure that unsanctioned expenditure does not become a norm.

₹9,122 crore

The latest CAG report said during the fiscal 2023-24, the Railway Ministry had incurred an unauthorised expenditure of ₹9,122.24 crore involving 1999 cases. In the previous year, it reported that a similar expense to the tune of ₹6,483 crore was reported in 1,932 cases.

The Railways had spent ₹6,19,837.90 crore against the sanctioned grant of ₹6,47,031.69 crore registering a net saving of ₹27,193.69 crore in 2022-23.

People must protest against attack on Iran, India's foreign policy: N. Ram

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

People must protest against imperialist attacks on Iran and other countries, as well as India's current foreign policy, N. Ram, Director of The Hindu Group, said on Sunday.

"We have come to a stage where people must protest against this transformation (of India's foreign policy), side by side, with our struggle against imperialist attacks on various states and the people of those countries. I would like to express on behalf of everyone here, solidarity with those who are facing imperialist attacks in West Asia, in Latin America, and elsewhere," Mr. Ram said at a seminar on "Imperialist aggression and its impact" at H.K.S. Surjeet Bhavan in central Delhi.

The event was attended by the Cuban Ambassador to India, Juan Carlos Marsan Aguilera; senior journalist Seema Chisti; and leaders from the Left parties.

N. Ram, Director, The Hindu Group, speaks during a seminar in Delhi on Sunday. SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

Mr. Ram said the BJP government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi had adopted a "shameful policy" after the "treacherous" attack on Iran by the U.S. and Israel. "Israel and the United States treacherously launched an attack on Iran and assassinated the head of the country, the Supreme Leader... And India, I think, is one of the worst-hit countries," he said.

Mr. Ram said "war crimes" and "humanitarian crimes" had been committed in Iran and schoolgirls had been murdered in one of the missile strikes.

"Not only did they [India] fail to condemn the assassination of the Supreme Leader... they also created the feeling through the Prime Minister's [Mr. Modi's] visit to Israel, precisely at the wrong moment, that there was some kind of collusion. Or at least, this visit provided a cover for [Israel Prime Minister Benjamin] Netanyahu along with the United States to launch this atrocious attack," he said.

He said the transformation of India's foreign policy, which was "deeply" concerning, was visible in three interrelated developments. "Deepening strategic partnership with the United States, the consolidation of an overt alliance with Israel, and the weakening of India's historical commitment to anti-colonial solidarity, especially in relation to Palestine and Iran," he said.

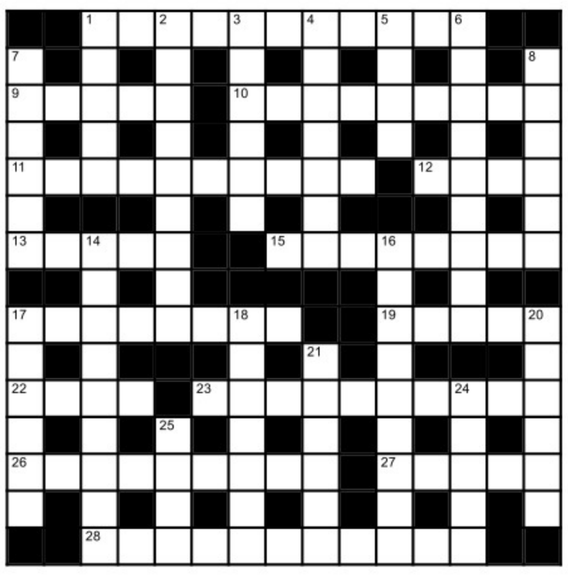
Mr. Ram said the most striking manifestation of India's foreign policy transformation was its changing stance towards the Palestinian struggle.

TH CROSSWORD + 14754

(set by Incognito)

Solve this puzzle online and access more puzzles at *https://thehindu.com/crosswords*

SCAN TO PLAY



Across

1 Disclosures from relatives travelling around Ontario (11)
9 Silver containing liquor's growing old (5)
10 After dismantling a trap, soldiers start to tackle flat (9)
11 Gradually... like climbing stairs (4,2,4)
12 Type of pie made by female network (4)
13 Small and fine modification covering length (5)
15 Do without stags? (3,5)
17 Funnily, Dick owns something usually found near an airstrip (8)
19 Appraised turncoat followed by editor (5)
22 Sadly, unfinished salad is returned (4)
23 Communication devices for use in prisons? (10)
26 Bird sitting on fort starts to attack in retaliation in kind (3,3,3)
27 From the latter part, treasurer is more certain (5)
28 Quick training not recommended for aviators! (5,6)

Down

1 Increase serai construction (5)
2 After Virginia, Georgia accepts financial instruments for vagrants (9)
3 Meet and work together, fabricating lies about artificial intelligence (6)
4 Peter, a Zulu, produces aerial equipment used in the circus (7)
5 Selects back street after operation (4)
6 Suspect all tamers ill treated (5,1,3)
7 Look after average Zoroastrian (6)
8 Coloured fluid in pig-pen is smelly (6)
14 Attic fans turning? Splendid! (9)
16 Buyer's follower follows purdah to some extent (9)
17 Eccentric mother in law throwing away lemon to produce ghostly creature (6)
18 Chinese badly hate consuming eastern animal (7)
20 Take away weapons from maids running around rebel leader (6)
21 Before game of chance, baron's drunk (6)
24 Run back with directions and give medical aid (5)
25 Couch possessed by abbess of Accra (4)

SUDOKU

	6		5	4				7
3	8		2			6		
					1	5		
					5		6	
		6		2		1		
	4		7					
		8	4					
		9			2		5	6
7				6	8		9	

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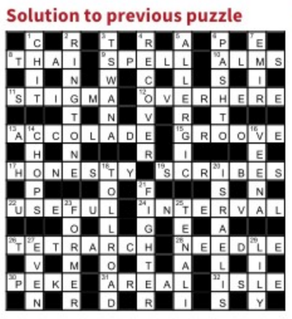
DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

Solution to previous puzzle



Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

5	1	4	9	7	8	2	3	6
8	2	3	6	4	5	1	7	9
7	6	9	3	2	1	5	8	4
9	3	6	8	1	4	7	5	2
2	8	1	7	5	6	9	4	3
4	5	7	2	9	3	8	6	1
6	7	8	1	3	2	4	9	5
1	9	5	4	6	7	3	2	8
3	4	2	5	8	9	6	1	7

FAITH

Time management key

Human life and time are extremely precious because, unlike material things that can be regained or replaced, time once lost is gone forever. Effective time management is essential for leading a purposeful and meaningful life. Valluvar says postponement, forgetfulness, laziness, and excessive sleep lead to destruction of human life.

Managing time well through planning, prioritisation, scheduling and avoiding delays and distractions is the foundation for a productive and purposeful life. By organising responsibilities, we can make the most of our valuable time. Thanneerpalli Sri Krishnan Swamy said in a discourse that, from a spiritual viewpoint, the productive use of time means fulfilling duties, performing righteous actions (dharma), gaining wisdom, and maintaining an elevated mind. Wasting time is, therefore, neglecting life's true purpose.

Many people spend most of their time pursuing worldly pleasures such as material possessions, status, or enjoyment. However, such experiences do not provide lasting satisfaction or permanent results. Eventually, people realise that what they once believed to be permanent is actually temporary. Realising later in life that time was spent on temporary pursuits can bring regret or a sense of lost meaning. Understanding life's true purpose early helps avoid this and encourages wise use of time. According to spiritual philosophy, the human body is influenced by three qualities: *Sattva* (purity and wisdom), *Rajas* (activity and desire), and *Tamas* (ignorance and inertia). To attain lasting happiness and spiritual growth, one must cultivate *Sattva* guna while reducing influence of *Rajas* and *Tamas*.

When the 'promise' is not the 'policy'

COVERNOTE

K. Nitya Kalyani

Ever regretted buying an insurance policy? Yeah? Me too! It happens to many of us and for various reasons. One of them is mis-selling.

This column often advises readers to do homework before committing money to an insurance policy, warning them against 'mis-buying'. But what is mis-selling?

If you have bought an insurance policy relying on advice and discover later that you have to pay annual premiums on what was sold to you as a single premium policy, if you realise there is a lock-in period for exiting the policy that you did not know about, if you find that the 'mandatory' policy you were pressured into taking was optional.... chances are you are a victim of mis-selling.

Union Finance Minister, Nirmala Sitharaman, recently warned banks quite sternly against mis-selling insurance and advised them to focus on their core business of lending.

But once upon a time bank margins were so squeezed that the opportunity to cross-sell insurance to earn fee-based income was a blessing.

It suited a rapidly expanding insurance industry which needed a wide and deep financial services network. So was born bancassurance andit has contributed significantly to insurance sales over the decades.

Pressure selling

Insurance, it is said, is always sold and never bought. The reluctant and ignorant prospect has to be convinced. Badgering, scare tactics and the lure of saving tax helps the process.

Almost all intermediaries hard-sell insurance, but some add false promises, partial information and even outright misinformation. It could be about the nature of the policy, suitability, pricing, what you are entitled to from the policy or what you are obligated to do to maintain it.

Some deception is 'expected' in marketing and selling, after all that's why it is said, "let the buyer beware". But when you read about an 80-year old who was sold a 100-year term policy, words fail you.

Insurance is an intangible product, complex and trust-based. Add to this customer reluctance, low financial literacy and even some active revulsion about the product. This is the opportunity for mis-selling.

However, aggressive selling is not necessarily mis-selling. The former is persistent and high-pitched. When it involves false promises or strategic silence on some policy features, it becomes mis-selling.

Mis-selling is not outright fraud either. It exists in a grey zone where the disclaimers and documents say one thing with the signatures prove it. But the implied benefits and understanding of the policy are different.

Like a long-term insurance policy sold as "just like a fixed deposit, but even better" to someone investing retirement savings. Like a hospitalisation policy that is projected as a complete or unlimited cover. Like a 'compulsory' home fire policy to go with a home loan.

When reality clashes with expectations, trust is lost. On the policy, the seller, the insurance company and industry. Maybe even on insurance itself. What is devastating is that it happens at the moment of the paying customer's deepest need.

We will see the hows and whys of insurance mis-selling in the forthcoming instalments of CoverNote. And explore how you as a customer can safeguard yourself against it, or seek remedies when needed.

(The writer is a business journalist specialising in insurance & corporate history)

Send queries on personal finance and investing to the moneywise@thehindu.co.in ID. Our experts in personal finance will respond to select queries, but will not give specific recommendations for investment in a particular mutual fund, share or fixed deposit.

Regardless of how wars unfold, investors must stay prepared to protect their portfolios. .ILLLUSTRATION: SAINATH B.

When the cannons boom: stock markets in wartime

War may come and war may go, but the stock markets go on for ever. But there's a catch, markets can fall, keep falling and remain bearish in the short term; staying invested when it bleeds is the real magic for building wealth

BOURSES AND BULLETS

Vaishali R Venkat

When cannons roar and nations descend into conflict, it sets off a cascading effect. The impact ripples far beyond battlefields, reaching deep into financial markets. Contrary to the conventional wisdom, war does not always trigger chaos or crashes.

History shows markets can plunge into volatility, remain resilient, or eventually recover after periods of intense sell-offs.

The hail of bullets have even brought down the curtains on markets for extended periods. So, no two conflicts affect markets alike. But regardless of how wars unfold, investors must stay prepared to protect their portfolios. Let's rewind the clock of wars and markets...

World War I

On June 28, 1914, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, was assassinated, in Sarajevo (then part of Austro-Hungarian Empire). Following this, tensions escalated and Europe edged towards a wider conflict, which culminated in the outbreak of World War I.

The financial panic intensified so much and stock exchanges across Europe were shut. In the United States, the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) downed its shutters for nearly 19 weeks from July 31 to December 11, 1914. This suspension is said to be the longest hiatus in the global financial system. Gripped by fear and uncertainty, investors rushed towards safety. The demand for gold surged, triggering heavy selloffs in stocks. To improve economic stability, the U.S. government invoked the Aldrich-Vreeland Act of 1908, allowing banks to issue emergency currency backed by securities rather than gold.

> During WW-I, the financial panic intensified so much and stock exchanges across Europe were shut. In the U.S., the New York Stock Exchange downed shutters for nearly 19 weeks

The War put an end to the international Gold Standard monetary system, as most warring nations halted the free conversion of currency into gold and began hoarding gold reserves. The U.S. continued to honour gold convertibility within the U.S while restricting the outflow of gold through an export embargo. Further, the disruption triggered an acute liquidity crunch, as banks struggled to supply cash.

World War II

In September 1939, World War II unfolded with a different economic impact when Adolf Hitler's Nazi Germany invaded Poland. Markets remained open but the crisis shifted from liquidity to that of physical capacity, as widespread destruction of industry and infrastructure across Europe and East Asia crippled production. During World War II (1939-1945), the stock markets moved in phases rather than a straight line. Historical S&P index data indicated that the market initially surged around 14% in the month after Germany's invasion of Poland in 1939, only to decline by about 6% in 1940 as fears of a wider war intensified. The market eventually bottomed in 1942, with the S&P 500 reaching its low.

> During WW-II, markets remained open but the crisis shifted from liquidity to that of physical capacity, as widespread destruction of infra across Europe and East Asia crippled production

1973 Yom Kippur War

During the Yom Kippur War, stock markets did not collapse immediately but the real damage came from the oil shock that followed. On October 6, 1973, during the Jewish holy day of Yom Kippur, Egyptian and Syrian forces launched a surprise offensive against Israel. In response, on October 17, 1973, Arab members of Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC) imposed an oil embargo on the West and slashed production, driving oil prices to quadruple from $3 to $12 per barrel approximately by early 1974. After the oil shock, oil exports were priced in U.S. dollars, increasing global demand for U.S. dollars. This triggered one of the worst bear markets in modern history, with the S&P 500 falling roughly 40-45% between 1973 and 1974, over a period of nearly two years.

War may come and go

Across a century of turmoil, stock markets have endured two World Wars, the Great Depression, Arab oil embargo, 2000s dot-com crash, U.S. 9/11 attack, 2008 financial crisis, inflationary spirals, hyperinflations, COVID-19 pandemic, political chaos, scams and scandals, bank collapses, black swan events and what not. War may come and war may go, but the stock markets go on for ever. But there's a catch. Markets can fall, keep falling and remain bearish in the short term. However, this uncertainty is not a bug but a toll for long-term wealth creation. Investing is easy but staying invested when it bleeds red is the real magic.

'Lost decades'

Beware! A stark counterexample: Japan's index Nikkei 225 peaked at nearly 39,000 on December 29, 1989, and took nearly 34 years to bounce back to that level in February 2024 and crossing 40,000 in March 2024. The bursting of Japan's late-1980s asset bubble led to deflation and decades of slow growth, known as the Lost Decades.

The stock market is a labyrinth that no brilliant mind can decode with complete accuracy. Yet one can navigate this ocean with planning and patience. Do not indulge in panic selling; if there is no immediate need for cash, do not exit in red; avoid making hurried changes to your portfolio; maintain adequate liquidity for emergencies; continue your SIPs and use declines as an opportunity to average your investments. Above all, be patient, stay disciplined, and diversify: never put all your eggs in one basket.

(The writer is an NISM & CRISIL-certified Wealth Manager and certified in NISM's Research Analyst module)

How ETFs fit into your portfolio

THINKINVESTOR

For a chosen benchmark, whether broad-cap or large-cap index, it is best to pick an ETF with high liquidity

Venkatesh Bangaruswamy

You can set up systematic investment plans (SIPs) on exchange-traded funds (ETFs) to accumulate wealth to achieve life goals. You can also actively trade ETFs to capture short-term gains from their price movements. In this article, we discuss how to set up a simple process to do both.

The core-satellite framework refers to the process of simultaneously creating goal-based (core) portfolios and a trading (satellite) portfolio. The objective is to profit from short-term trends in the market without compromising on your life goals.

Now, suppose you invest in an ETF on the Nifty Index. You can set up an SIP matching the time horizon of a life goal. For instance, if one of your goals is for eight years, you can set up a monthly SIP for eight years. You can choose the same ETF for your satellite portfolio.

The difference is that you should time your entry and exit for your satellite portfolio. Because you are trading the same ETF with two different objectives, the cash flows must be easily identifiable to efficiently manage the investments. You must, therefore, have two different trading accounts –one account earmarked for the core and the other for the satellite.

You can have one account in your family member's name and the other in your name.

This is important for operational efficiency. You will trade frequently in your satellite portfolio, buying when the Nifty Index declines and selling when the index hits your price target.

This trading account must be linked to a bank account that is only meant for your satellite portfolio. The other account from where you set up SIPs on the ETF must be linked to a master savings account from where you manage all the SIPs for your goal-based investments (core portfolio).

That way, whenever you rebalance (sell units to realise gains) your ETF investments, the proceeds are credited to your master savings account. This helps you to easily identify the sale proceeds and reinvest in bank deposits earmarked for that goal. ETFs are typically passive products. Such products are expected to mirror their benchmark index before costs.

So, all ETFs on the same benchmark will generate similar returns. This moderates regret that you could suffer from when you invest in active funds because the funds you did not choose could perform better than the ones you did.

For a chosen benchmark, whether broad-cap or large-cap index, it is best to pick an ETF with high liquidity.

(The author offers training programmes for individuals to manage their personal investments)

Personal Loans

Rates and Charges		Loan amount 5 lakh Tenure 5 years	Loan amount 1 lakh Tenure 5 years	(% of loan amount)
Name of Lender	**Interest Rate (%)**	**EMI (Rs)**	**EMI (Rs)**	**Processing fee**
HDFC Bank	9.99 onwards	10,621 onwards	2,124 onwards	Up to Rs 6,500
Tata Capital	10.99 onwards	10,869 onwards	2,174 onwards	Up to 5%
State Bank of India	10.00-15.00	10,624-11,895	2,125-2,379	Up to 1.50% (Rs. 1,000 - Rs. 15,000)
ICICI Bank	9.99 onwards	10,621 onwards	2,124 onwards	Up to 2%
Bank of Baroda*	10.15-18.00	10,660-12,697	2,132-2,539	Up to 2% (Max. Rs 10,000)
Axis Bank	9.50 onwards	10,501 onwards	2,100 onwards	Up to 2%
Kotak Mahindra Bank	10.99 onwards	10,869 onwards	2,174 onwards	Up to 5%
Bank of India	10.85-16.15	10,834-12,199	2,167-2,440	Up to 1% (Min. Rs 250; Max. Rs 15,000)
Canara Bank	9.70-15.15	10,550-11.934	2,110-2,387	0.50% (Rs 1,000 - Rs 5,000)
Punjab National Bank	10.25-16.80	10,685-12,373	2,137-2,475	Up to 1%
HSBC Bank	9.75 onwards	10,562 onwards	2,112 onwards	Up to 2%
Federal Bank	11.75 - 18.99	11,059 - 12,968	2,212 - 2,594	Up to 3%
Union Bank of India	8.75 - 12.55	10,319-11,262	2,064-2,252	Up to 1% (Max. Rs 7,500)
Bajaj Finserv	10.00-30.00	10,624-16,177	2,125-3,235	Up to 3.93%
Punjab & Sind Bank	9.60-13.85	10,525-11,595	2,105-2,319	0.50%-1%
Indian Overseas Bank	10.25 onwards	10,685 onwards	2,137 onwards	Up to 0.75%
UCO Bank	9.95 - 13.20	10,611-11,428	2,122-2,286	Up to 1% (Min. Rs 750)
IDFC FIRST Bank	9.99 onwards	10,621 onwards	2,124 onwards	Up to 3.5%
Bank of Maharashtra	8.75-13.55	10,319-11,518	2,064-2,304	Up to 1% (Max. Rs 10,000)
Central Bank of India	9.85-11.65	10,587-11,034	2,117-2,207	Up to 1%
IndusInd Bank	10.49 onwards	10,744 onwards	2,149 onwards	Up to 3.5% (2% for instant personal loans for limited period)

*Interest concession of 0.10% to customers opting for group credit life insurance
Rates and charges as of March 25

Car Loans

Rates and Charges		Loan amount 5 lakh Tenure 5 years	(% of loan amount)
Name of Lender	**Interest Rate (%)**	**EMI (Rs)**	**Processing fee**
Union Bank of India	7.40-9.45	9,995 - 10,489	Up to Rs 1,000
Punjab National Bank	7.55-10.70	10,031 - 10,797	Up to 0.25% (Rs. 1,000 - Rs. 1,500)
Bank of Baroda	7.60 - 11.35	10,043 - 10,959	Up to Rs. 2,000
Canara Bank	7.45-11.45	10,007 - 10,984	0.25% (Rs 1,000 - Rs 5,000)
Bank of India	7.60-12.55	10,043 - 11,262	Up to 0.25% (Rs. 2,500 - Rs. 10,000)
UCO Bank	7.35-10.00	9,983 - 10,624	0.5% (Max. Rs 5,000)
State Bank of India	8.70 - 9.85	10,355 - 10,587	Rs 750 - Rs 1,500
IDBI Bank	7.75-9.40	10,078 - 10,477	Rs 2,500
Bank of Maharashtra*	7.45-11.75	10,007 - 11,059	NIL
Indian Overseas Bank	7.55-12.00	10,031 - 11,122	NIL
ICICI Bank	8.50 onwards	10,258 onwards	Up to 2%
HDFC Bank	8.15 onwards	10,174 onwards	Up to 0.5% (Rs. 3,500 - Rs. 8,000)
Karnataka Bank	8.00-11.50	10,138 - 10,996	Up to 0.60% (Rs. 2,500 - Rs. 11,000)
Punjab and Sind Bank**	7.50-14.00	10,019 - 11,634	0.25% (Rs. 1,000 - Rs. 15,000)
Indian Bank	7.50-9.65	10,019 - 10,513	Rs. 1,200
IDFC FIRST Bank	9.99 onwards	10,621 onwards	Up to Rs. 10,000
Central Bank of India	7.60-9.20	10,043 - 10,428	No processing fees till 31.03.2026

*0.25% interest rate concession for home loan borrowers/existing customers with 6 months relationship with bank
**Concession of up to 50% on processing fee for PSB Apna Vahan Sugam.
Rates and charges as on March 25
Source: Paisabazaar.com

JERUSALEM

Netanyahu 'orders military to 'further expand' security zone

AFP

Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Sunday that he had ordered the military to "further expand" a security zone in Lebanon as Israel continues its campaign. "This is intended to definitively neutralise the threat of invasion [by Hezbollah militants] and to keep anti-tank missile fire away from the border." AFP

CARACAS

Maduro thanks supporters in first online post from U.S. prison

REUTERS

Ousted Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro and his wife, captured by U.S. forces in a nighttime raid in January, said on Saturday that they feel "steadfast" and "serene" in their first social media post from prison. Mr. Maduro and his wife Cilia Flores have been held in a Brooklyn jail for almost three months. AFP

KABUL

Extreme weather in Afghanistan leaves 17 people dead: authorities

AP

Severe flooding, a landslide and thunderstorms in parts of Afghanistan left 17 people dead and 26 injured over the last 24 hours, with more heavy rainfall predicted, authorities said on Sunday. The severe weather also left 147 homes either completely or partially destroyed and wiped out 80 km of roads. AP

VATICAN CITY

Pope Leo says God rejects prayers of leaders who start, wage wars

AP

Pope Leo said on Sunday that God rejects the prayers of leaders who start wars and have "hands full of blood", in unusually forceful remarks as the Iran war entered its second month. Addressing tens of thousands of people in St. Peter's Square, the pontiff said that Jesus cannot be used to justify any wars. REUTERS

Oli remanded in custody for 5 days as protests continue across Nepal

Oli attends remand proceedings virtually due to deteriorating health, while Lekhak was physically produced in court; supporters of Communist Party of Nepal (UML) stage protests; ex-Energy Minister arrested in a money laundering case

Press Trust of India
KATHMANDU

Nepal's former Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli was remanded in judicial custody for five days by the Kathmandu District Court on Sunday, even as protests continue to erupt in various parts of the country over the arrests.

Mr. Oli and former Home Minister Ramesh Lekhak were arrested on Saturday for their alleged involvement in suppressing the Gen Z movement of September 8 and 9 last year, in which 76 people, including around two dozen youth, were killed. The arrests came a day after the newly formed Balendra Shah government decided to implement the report of the probe commission into the Gen Z protests in its first Cabinet meeting.

Hue and cry: Supporters of K.P. Sharma Oli march escorted by police during a protest, in Kathmandu, Nepal, on Sunday. REUTERS

Mr. Lekhak was presented before the district court seeking remand for ten days to carry out further investigation into their alleged involvement in the incidents of killings. He was also remanded in custody for five days. However, ex-PM Oli virtually attended the district court session due to his deteriorating health conditions, according to Deepak Kumar Shrestha, information officer at the district court.

Mr. Oli is currently undergoing medical treatment at Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital in Maharajgunj, Kathmandu, as his health conditions deteriorated when he was taken to the hospital on Saturday following the arrest.

Workers of the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Lennist) held a protest in Maitighar against the arrest of the party chair, Mr. Oli.

Meanwhile, Nepal police on Sunday arrested former Energy Minister and Nepali Congress leader Deepak Khadka in connection with a money laundering case, local media reported.

During the Gen Z protest last year, images and videos had surfaced showing burnt fragments of banknotes at the residences of Mr. Khadka and former Prime Ministers Sher Bahadur Deuba and Pushpa Kamal Dahal.

Mr. Khadka was accused of receiving financial benefits in exchange for facilitating licences and contracts for projects while serving as the Minister for Energy, Water Resources and Irrigation.

N. Korea tests missile engine capable of reaching the U.S.

Associated Press
SEOUL

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un observed a test of an upgraded solid-fuel engine for weapons capable of reaching the U.S. mainland, and called it a significant development boosting his country's strategic military arsenal, state media reported on Sunday.

While the test was in line with Mr. Kim's stated goal of acquiring more agile, hard-to-detect missiles targeting the U.S. and its allies, some experts speculate North Korea's claim may be an exaggeration. Missiles with built-in solid propellants are easier to move and conceal their launches than liquid-fuel weapons, which in general must be fuelled before liftoffs and cannot last long.

Kim Jong-un inspecting a combustion test of a solid-fuel rocket engine at an undisclosed location in North Korea. AFP

The official *Korean Central News Agency* reported Mr. Kim watched the ground jet test of the engine using a composite carbon fibre material. It said the engine's maximum thrust is 2,500 kilonewtons, up from about 1,970 kilonewtons reported in a similar solid-fuel engine test in September.

KCNA reported the test was conducted as part of the country's five-year arms build-up meant to upgrade "strategic strike means," a term referring to nuclear-capable ballistic missiles and other weapons.

Mr. Kim said the latest engine test had "great significance in putting the country's strategic military muscle on the highest level," according to KCNA.

Mojtaba Khamenei thanks Iraq in latest written message

Agence France-Presse
PARIS

Iran's new Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei has, in a written message, thanked the people of Iraq for their support in the war against the United States and Israel, Iranian media said on Sunday.

Mojtaba Khamenei, the son of former Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei who was killed in an air strike at the start of the war on February 28, has still yet to appear in public after being named and has only issued a handful of written statements.

In the message, Mr. Khamenei "expressed his appreciation to the supreme religious authority (in Iraq) and the people of Iraq for their clear stance against aggression against Iran and their support for our country", the *ISNA* news agency said, referring to Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, one of the most revered figures in Shia Islam. No further details were given on how the message was transmitted.

Israel blocks Jerusalem's Latin Patriarch from Holy Sepulchre on Palm Sunday

Agence France-Presse
JERUSALEM

Israeli police blocked the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, from entering the Church of the Holy Sepulchre to celebrate Palm Sunday mass, which the Prime Minister's office said was done out of 'concern for his safety".

"This morning, the Israeli Police prevented the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem ... together with the Custos of the Holy Land, the Most Reverend Fr. Francesco Ielpo ... from entering the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem as they made their way to celebrate the Palm Sunday Mass," a statement from the Patriarchate said.

A Palestinian Christian stands at the doors of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre after finding them locked on Sunday. REUTERS

The two were proceeding privately, without any ceremonial procession, and were forced to turn back, it said.

"As a result, and for the first time in centuries, the Heads of the Church were prevented from celebrating the Palm Sunday Mass at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre," it said, calling the incident a "grave precedent" that disregards the sensibilities of Christians worldwide.

The Church of the Holy Sepulchre contains the sites where Christians believe Christ was crucified and where he was entombed and resurrected, making it the holiest location in the religion.

Russia reports fire in new Ukrainian strike on major Baltic port

Agence France-Presse
MOSCOW

A drone strike claimed by Ukraine triggered a fire at Russia's Baltic port of Ust-Luga as the regional governor on Sunday reported new damage at the major exporting hub hit for a second time in days.

Ukraine has intensified retaliatory attacks on Russian infrastructure – including refineries, oil depots and ports – saying they are justified as part of the effort to cut revenues funding Russia's offensive.

"There is damage to the port of Ust-Luga. There were no casualties," Russian regional governor Alexander Drozdenko said on social media. He said that rescuers were working to extinguish a fire at the port, a key hub for Russian fertilizers, oil and coal exports.

Ukraine's SBU security service later on Sunday claimed the attack saying its drones "successfully struck" the Ust-Luga oil terminal.

Sport

Fitzpatrick claims his maiden DP World Tour title

GOLF

Uthra Ganesan
GURUGRAM

The contrast was striking. Alex Fitzpatrick tapped the ball one last time and sank his face in his hands, unable to control his tears even as Eugenio Chacarra stood emotionless on the 18th green, wondering all the what-ifs of a day that saw fortunes swing as wildly as the scores on the board and some of the drives on the course.

Fitzpatrick won his maiden DP World Tour title with a nine-under 279 four-day total on Sunday to become only the third Englishman to win the Hero Indian Open title and the first since Matt Wallace in 2018. Fitzpatrick, who started the day four shots behind defending champion Chacarra, had eight birdies on the final day, five of them on the back nine for a two-shot victory.

Patience pays: Fitzpatrick played steadily to upstage defending champion Chacarra. AFP

The overnight lead helped Chacarra stay ahead for a large part of the day, but the curse of the course, which has never seen a successful title defence, loomed large. Patience has been the keyword through the week, and Fitzpatrick found his mojo and his putter on the green, sinking birdies at will, including an incredibly long one on the 11th and then two more to go level at nine-under after 13 holes.

Struggle

Chacarra, in contrast, struggled with his putts, barely staying in the game. The tide finally turned on the 15th when Chacarra bogeyed the first of his three consecutive holes, Fitzpatrick birdied the same, and the leaderboard flipped at the top. Once there, Fitzpatrick did not relent, firming his hold to open up a four-stroke lead that even a double bogey on the 18th could not bridge.

Chacarra finished with his worst round of the week, scoring a 75 for a seven-under 281 at second spot, while the third member of the group, South Africa's M.J. Daffue, finished tied third at 283.

Top scores: 279: Alex Fitzpatrick (Eng, 70-68-72-69); **281:** Eugenio Chacarra (Esp, 67-69-70-75); **283:** M.J. Daffue (RSA, 71-67-72-73), Andy Sullivan (Eng, 72-71-69-71), Ugo Coussaud (Fra, 71-69-74-69); **285:** Ewen Ferguson (Sco, 70-73-69-73), Calum Hill (Sco, 69-73-72-71), Francesco Molinari (Ita, 72-72-71-70); **286:** David Law (Sco, 71-70-70-75), Matteo Manassero (Ita, 72-72-74-68). **Indians: 298:** S. Manoj S (76-70-76-76), Om Prakash Chouhan (73-71-73-81); **307:** Kshitij Naveed Kaul (73-75-77-82).

AIFF presents bids to the EC

FOOTBALL

Neeladri Bhattacharjee
CHENNAI

The bids for the commercial rights of the Indian Super League, the Federation Cup and the Indian Women's League (IWL 1 and 2) were all up for discussion at the Executive Committee meeting of the All India Football Federation (AIFF) on Sunday.

"We placed all bids in front of the committee and gave a history of what had happened from the first tender up to now, and we placed the amounts which were bid. The next step will be to inform the general body because it's more than ₹5 crore," M. Satyanarayan, the AIFF's Deputy Secretary General, told *The Hindu*. "Some time next week, we'll get the two bidders for Package A (ISL/ Federation Cup) to speak with the clubs, who are one of our major stakeholders, to address their queries."

The Committee decided that one of the 'Big Four' accounting and auditing firms will do a comparative study of both bids.

"That will help all of us make an informed decision because it's a long-term contract. After that, we'll decide who we are going with, after getting it ratified by the general body," Satyanarayan said.

"Once this process is done, maybe, around April 15, we'll be asking all the ISL clubs to express their interest in the 2026-27 season so that we get their confirmations."

Football Sports Development Limited (FSDL) did not submit any official bid in response to the tender. Any discussions involving the former Master Rights Agreement holder took place after the March 26 deadline for submission of commercial bids. Accordingly, contrary to an earlier report, the All India Football Federation (AIFF) did not reject any bid from FSDL.

The other agenda of the meeting was the implementation of the AIFF constitution by all State associations, in accordance with the National Sports Governance Act (NSGA).

"We are going to give the associations time till about June to fall in line, after which, they will be eligible for national elections of the Federation," Satyanarayan added.

LONG WAIT ENDS

Happy we were able to win after 13 years, says MI captain Hardik

EMMANUAL YOGINI

It's been a long wait. 13 years is a long time [winning first game of the season]. Very glad that we were finally able to do it. We knew the pitch was good and felt 221 was always gettable. Rohit and Rickelton were brilliant. Shardul has a big heart, and we are really happy for him — Mumbai Indians captain Hardik Pandya.

NOT OUR CALL

Direct the question to CA, says Rahane on Green not bowling

EMMANUAL YOGINI

KKR skipper Ajinkya Rahane said that the question of why all-rounder Cameron Green was not bowling "should be directed to Cricket Australia". "When Green starts to bowl, the combination will be slightly different. At the moment, we have to see the balance. So hopefully, Green starts to bowl soon," Rahane said after the match.

HEARTFELT

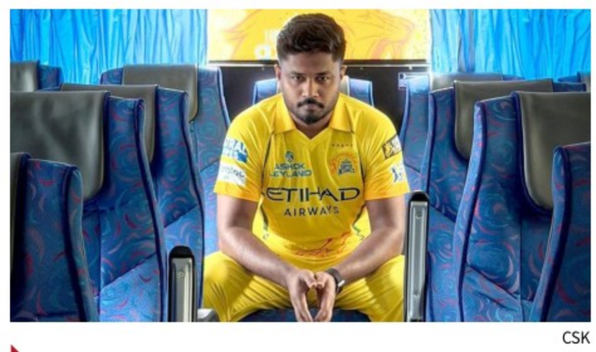
We miss our family members: Patidar on stampede victims

K. MURALI KUMAR

RCB skipper Rajat Patidar paid tribute to the 11 persons who died in the stampede last year. "You feel bad when you miss your family member. I say family member because everyone who supports us is family. We miss them," Patidar said in the post-match press conference after the victory over SRH in the IPL opener.

SANGASPEAK

'A good trade is when both sides are slightly happy and unhappy'



CSK

In trades, the best outcome is when both sides are happy but also slightly unhappy. We were sad to see Sanju go. But it was something that was going to happen. We brought in Jaddu and Curran, which balanced our squad. Both teams might feel they could have got more — that usually means it's a good trade — Kumar Sangakkara.

Rickelton and Rohit sizzle as MI breaks a jinx

The duo's blistering 148-run opening stand powers team to first win in season-opener since 2012; Shardul shines with three scalps; Rahane, Raghuvanshi score half-centuries

IPL-19

Amol Karhadkar
MUMBAI

Rohit Sharma's off-side masterclass complemented by Ryan Rickelton's on-side dominance helped Mumbai Indians end a 14-year wait and begin their Indian Premier League campaign with a commanding six-wicket win over Kolkata Knight Riders at the Wankhede Stadium on Sunday night.

Chasing 221, Mumbai Indians barely broke a sweat as Rohit and Rickelton stitched together a blistering 148-run opening stand off just 72 balls against a hapless KKR bowling attack.

The platform ensured the chase never stretched the home side's batting resources, with Naman Dhir sealing the win by off-driving Anukul Roy for four off the first ball of the final over – handing MI their first season-opening victory since 2012.

Rohit began cautiously, opening his account with a thick inside-edged four off Blessing Muzarabani, one of three IPL debutants for KKR.

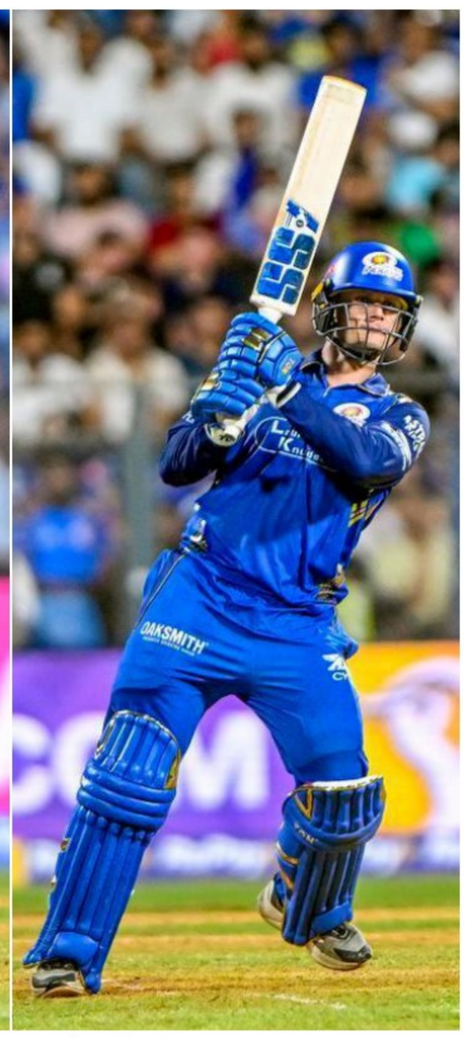
But once set, the MI veteran produced a vintage display of off-side stroke-play. He lofted Muzarabani for an inside-out six in the fourth over, greeted Varun Chakaravarthy with the shot of the night, and later sent Kartik Tyagi soaring over covers. In between, the crisp drives through cover-point flowed freely, drawing loud "Rohit, Rohit" chants from the Wankhede crowd.

Rickelton, meanwhile, dominated the leg-side, capitalising on wayward lines from the KKR bowlers. The visitors' woes were compounded by captain Ajinkya Rahane leaving the field after the third over due to cramps, depriving them of on-field leadership during a crucial phase.

Earlier, Rahane had led KKR's charge with the bat after being put in.

Along with Finn Allen, he powered the side to a brisk start before Shardul Thakur's golden arm turned the tide. Making his MI debut, Shardul struck in each of his first three overs, first dismissing Allen with a knuckle ball before removing Cameron Green with a clever change of pace.

Rahane, however, remained aggressive, welcoming Mayank Markande with two sixes and continuing his assault before Jasprit Bumrah briefly stemmed the flow. Shardul eventually dismissed Rahane in the 14th over, but late contributions ensured KKR finished with a competitive total – one that ultimately proved insufficient against Mumbai's dominant opening act.



Dazzling show: Rohit and Rickelton were on song, belting boundaries at will to kick-start Mumbai Indians' campaign. EMMANUAL YOGINI

Flying high: Shardul checked the Knight Riders' progress with vital strikes. EMMANUAL YOGINI

SCOREBOARD

KOLKATA KNIGHT RIDERS
Ajinkya Rahane c Hardik b Shardul 67 *(40b, 3x4, 5x6)*, Finn Allen c Tilak b Shardul 37 *(17b, 6x4, 2x6)*, Cameron Green c Rutherford b Shardul 18 *(10b, 1x4, 1x6)*, Angkrish Raghuvanshi c Tilak b Hardik 51 *(29b, 6x4, 2x6)*, Rinku Singh (not out) 33 *(21b, 4x4)*, Ramandeep Singh (not out) 4 *(4b)*; Extras (lb-2, nb-1, w-7): 10; Total (for four wkts. in 20 overs): 220.

FALL OF WICKETS
1-69 (Allen, 5.2 overs), 2-109 (Green, 8.5), 3-145 (Rahane, 13.3), 4-205 (Raghuvanshi, 18.3).

MUMBAI INDIANS BOWLING
Boult 4-0-38-0, Hardik 3-0-39-1, Ghazanfar 4-0-51-0, Bumrah 4-0-35-0, Shardul 4-0-39-3, Markande 1-0-16-0.

MUMBAI INDIANS
Ryan Rickelton run out 81 *(43b, 4x4, 8x6)*, Rohit Sharma c Anukul b Vaibhav 78 *(38b, 6x4, 6x6)*, Suryakumar Yadav **(Impact Player for Bumrah)** c Rinku b Tyagi 16 *(8b, 3x4)*, Tilak Varma c sub (Pandey) b Narine 20 *(14b, 4x4)*, Hardik Pandya (not out) 18 *(11b, 3x4)*, Naman Dhir (not out) 5 *(2b, 1x4)*; Extras (lb-2, nb-1, w-3): 6; Total (for four wkts. in 19.1 overs): 224.

FALL OF WICKETS
1-148 (Rohit, 11.5), 2-179 (Suryakumar, 14.2), 3-184 (Rickelton, 15.2), 4-215 (Tilak, 18.4).

KNIGHT RIDERS BOWLING
Vaibhav 4-0-52-1, Muzarabani 3-0-34-0, Varun 4-0-48-0, Tyagi **(Impact Player for Allen)** 4-0-43-1, Narine 3-0-30-1, Anukul 1.1-0-15-0.

Toss: MI; **PoM:** Shardul.
Mumbai Indians won by six wickets with five balls to spare.

Next assignment

KKR: April 2 vs. SRH
Kolkata, 7.30 p.m.

MI: April 4 vs. DC
Delhi, 3.30 p.m.

Pragg outwits Giri; draws for Divya, Vaishali

Sports Bureau

One of the year's biggest chess tournaments got off to an exciting start at Pegeia, Cyprus, on Sunday. And it was a good day at the Candidates for India, too, as R. Praggnanandhaa scored a fine win over his higher-rated Dutch rival Anish Giri.

In the women's Candidates, all the four games were drawn. Vaishali, Praggnanandhaa's elder sister, drew with Bibisara Assaubayeva of Kazakhstan, while Divya Deshmukh split the point with Ukraine's Anna Muzychuk.

Praggnaanandhaa faced Sicilian Defence from Giri and he won a king-side pawn on 28th move. The Chennai Grandmaster followed it up with an excellent pawn push on the same file.

Before long, Giri made a costly mistake with his knight, on the 36th move, when he should rather have pushed his pawn. Pragg did well to press on the advantage he was presented with, and went on to win in 51 moves.

The results (first round):
Open: Javokhir Sindarov (Uzb) bt Andrey Esipenko (Rus); Matthias Bluebaum (Ger) drew with Wei Yi (Chn); R. Praggnanandhaa bt Anish Giri (Ned); Fabiano Caruana (USA) bt Hikaru Nakamura (USA).
Women: Divya Deshmukh drew with Anna Muzychuk (Ukr); R. Vaishali drew with Bibisara Assaubayeva (Kaz); Aleksandra Goryachkina (Rus) Kateryna Lagno (Rus); Zhu Jiner (Chn) drew with Tan Zhongyi (Chn).

RR and CSK hit reset button, eye positive start

Tarun Shastry
GUWAHATI

There have been four occasions in the IPL when the Chennai Super Kings began its campaign away from home.

Each time, it has gone on to reach the playoffs, and on two of those occasions – 2018 and 2023 – it lifted the title in dramatic fashion.

In the 19th edition, Super Kings will take on Rajasthan Royals at the ACA-Barsapara Stadium here on Monday. History, therefore, offers an intriguing subplot – but this contest carries layers far beyond numbers, as it is shaped as much by transition as by recent form.

Both teams come in after underwhelming 2025 seasons. CSK missed the playoffs for a second straight year – a first in its history – raising questions about depth and renewal. RR endured a tougher campaign, finishing ninth after a slump that included seven consecutive defeats.

The Royals have responded with a significant overhaul, revamping personnel as well as its support staff and management structure. Yet, a strong core remains.

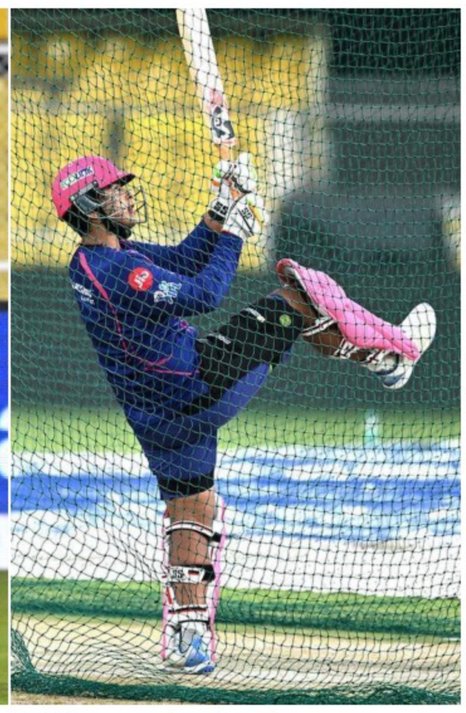
Yashasvi Jaiswal remains central at the top, while Vaibhav Suryavanshi adds explosiveness.

The middle-order, which struggled last season, will rely on Shimron Hetmyer and Dhruv Jurel, now strengthened by Ravindra Jadeja.

With the ball, much will depend on Jofra Archer up front, along with the experienced Sandeep Sharma. The addition of Ravi Bishnoi lends variety to the spin attack.

The visitor, too, has embraced change, injecting youth into its line-up. Ayush Mhatre and Dewald Brevis (though unavailable for the tie) bring fresh energy, while Prashant Veer and Kartik Sharma add finishing power alongside Shivam Dube. Ruturaj Gaikwad's leadership, combined with Sanju Samson's versatility, adds balance.

However, the five-time champion will be without M.S. Dhoni, who has been ruled out for two weeks with a calf strain – an early setback.



Key battle: CSK's think-tank would want to see the back of Suryavanshi at the earliest. RITU RAJ KONWAR

Today's match

RAJASTHAN ROYALS vs CHENNAI SUPER KINGS

Guwahati, 7.30 p.m.

HEAD-TO-HEAD

Played: 31

RR 15 | CSK 16

PREVIOUS MEETING

RR won by six wickets, 2025

LIVE ON STAR SPORTS 1, SS SELECT 1, 2 & JIOHOTSTAR

> Yes, Brevis is out and is currently in rehab. Hopefully, it won't be too long before he returns. We've invested in youth and Indian talent, and there's real energy in the group. The first game is always a good barometer
>
> **FLEMING**
> CSK head coach

The weather could also play a role. Persistent rain and drizzle here add uncertainty as both sides look to make an early statement. CSK will hope history repeats itself, while RR aims to turn promise into performance.

'We felt Parag was the best fit to lead'

Tarun Shastry
GUWAHATI

Ahead of their IPL season opener, Rajasthan Royals head coach Kumar Sangakkara and Chennai Super Kings' Stephen Fleming offered insights into team strategy, leadership decisions, and early challenges.

For RR, the spotlight is on the appointment of Riyan Parag as captain following the departure of Sanju Samson.

"Yes, we had multiple candidates, including Sandeep Sharma and Ravindra Jadeja. We had a very structured process with strict parameters. All of them were capable of captaining the side. But we felt Parag was the best fit.The conversations were tough, but he handled them really well," Sangakkara said.

For CSK, Fleming downplayed suggestions that the opening match signals a transition phase without M.S. Dhoni. "It's just a game without him. He's still heavily involved in the side, and his influence remains very strong".

'I only think of being a match-winner'

S. Shrivathsan

'Harpreet Brar' and 'hype' seldom get mentioned in the same sentence.

The Punjab Kings left-arm spinner has influenced many an IPL match with his miserly spells, especially in the last three seasons. But Harpreet has often flown under the radar as his numbers – 35 wickets in 49 games at 8.03 – do not tell the whole story.

Back in red and blue to quietly go about his business in IPL 2026, the 30-year-old is eager to remain a pivotal piece of the PBKS puzzle. "I've never paid attention to it (spotlight not being on him), but I've been put under pressure after being told that this is happening (laughs). Whenever I play, I only think of becoming a match-winner," Harpreet told *The Hindu* during a virtual interaction on Sunday.

"I want to help the team cross the line. Sometimes I succeed and sometimes I do not," he added.

In a tournament where the bowlers are put under the pump from the very beginning, Harpreet operates with a simple mantra.

Harpreet. PUNJAB KINGS

"I never pre-plan such things (whether to attack the batters or defend); But I always think about taking a wicket. Only when I take a wicket can I grow as a player."

Being led by Shreyas Iyer has helped Harpreet immensely. "Shreyas is the best captain I've played under. He has an on-field attitude; he talks a lot. He allows us to do what we want and asks us to play without pressure. If a Punjabi guy gets such backing, he can win the world."

For now, the tweaker would not mind clinching PBKS' maiden IPL trophy.

INBRIEF

India U-23 men thrash Bhutan in tri-nation championship

The India U-23 men's football team pumped five past Bhutan in the U-23 Tri-Nation Championship 2026 at the Golden Jubilee Stadium in Yupia, Arunachal Pradesh. Suhail Ahmad Bhat (51, 81) scored a brace, while Ricky Meetei Haobam (44), Tomba Singh Haobam (79), and Muhammed Ajsal (85) netted one each. This victory takes India to the top of the table, level on points (three) with Tajikistan, which defeated Bhutan 1-0 earlier this week.

Mary Kom considers move into professional boxing

Olympic bronze medallist and six-time world champion Indian boxer M.C. Mary Kom on Sunday said she was considering a move into professional boxing. The 43-year-old is past the age eligibility to compete on the amateur circuit. "Although I reached a stage where age restrictions prevented me from competing further in amateur boxing for the country, a new opportunity has surfaced in professional boxing," she said on the sidelines of the 'Sundays on Cycle' event. "I am taking some time to consider it. I am working hard and trying to make a comeback to show people what I can still do."

Sabalenka sinks Gauff for second straight Miami title

Aryna Sabalenka won her second straight Miami Open title on Sunday beating Coco Gauff 6-2, 4-6, 6-3 to complete a "Sunshine Double" Indian Wells-Miami sweep. The world number one from Belarus, fresh off her first triumph in the California desert, became the fifth woman – and the first since Iga Swiatek in 2022 – to win both of the elite early-season hardcourt WTA 1000 titles.

Fundora retains WBC super welterweight championship

Sebastian Fundora easily retained his WBC super welterweight championship, knocking out Keith Thurman at 1:17 of the sixth round in Las Vegas on Saturday. Referee Thomas Taylor stopped the fight after Fundora battered Thurman repeatedly, the former unified welterweight champion's bloody face showing the damage.

Martin snatches a dramatic US sprint victory, in lead

Jorge Martin overtook Francesco Bagnaia on the final lap to snatch victory in the sprint race at the US Grand Prix in Austin and take the MotoGP championship lead on Saturday. The Aprilia rider came from seventh on the grid to win a dramatic sprint in which Marco Bezzecchi crashed out and Marc Marquez also slid off the track, taking pole-sitter Fabio Di Giannantonio with him.

LIVE TELECAST

IPL: Star Sports 1 & JioHotstar, 7.30 p.m.

Football: European WC Qualifiers, Sony Sports Ten 5, 2, 1 & LIV, 8.30, 9.30 p.m. & 12.15 a.m. (Tuesday)

A lucky break sees Antonelli become youngest F1 championship leader

The 19-year-old Mercedes driver takes advantage of a mid-race safety car to leapfrog into the lead after a dreadful start from pole position

JAPANESE GP

Agence France-Presse
SUZUKA

Mercedes' Kimi Antonelli won the Japanese Grand Prix on Sunday for his second straight victory, as the 19-year-old Italian became the youngest driver in Formula One history to lead the world championship standings.

Antonelli took advantage of a mid-race safety car to leapfrog into the lead after a dreadful start from pole position and led home McLaren's Oscar Piastri by 13.722sec with Ferrari's Charles Leclerc a further 1.548sec back in third. He moved up to 72 points and leads the championship by nine points after three races, building on the first Grand Prix win of his career two weeks ago in China.

"Of course it's still too early to think about the championship but we're on a good way," said Antonelli.

His Mercedes teammate George Russell finished fourth to drop to second in the championship standings on 63 points. Leclerc is third on 49.

> I don't know what would have happened, what the outcome would have been without the safety car, but it definitely made my life a lot easier
> **ANTONELLI**

Russell battled Piastri for the lead over the first half of the race but pitted just before the safety car which dropped him out of contention for the win.

Piastri secured second in his first Grand Prix start of the season, after crashing on his way to the grid in the opener in Australia and missing the race in China because of a technical problem.

Piastri led for the first half of the race before the safety car gave Antonelli his chance.

McLaren's world champion Lando Norris was fifth ahead of Ferrari's Lewis Hamilton and Alpine's Pierre Gasly. Red Bull's four-time world champion Max Verstappen, the winner in Japan for the past four years, was eighth after starting from 11th.

Formula One now takes an extended break until the Miami Grand Prix on May 3.

The results: 1. Antonelli (Mercedes) 1h 28m 3.403s, 2. Piastri (McLaren) at +13.722s, 3. Leclerc (Ferrari) +15.270, 4. Russell (Mercedes) +15.754, 5. Norris (McLaren) +23.479, 6. Hamilton (Ferrari) +25.037, 7. Gasly (Alpine) +32.340, 8. Verstappen (Red Bull) +32.677, 9. Lawson (Racing Bulls) +50.180, 10. Ocon (Haas) +51.216, 11. Hulkenberg (Audi) +52.280, 12. Hadjar (Red Bull) +56.154, 13. Bortoleto (Audi) +59.078, 14. Lindblad (Racing Bulls) +59.848, 15. Sainz Jr. (Williams) +1m 05.008s, 16. Colapinto (Alpine) +1m 05.773s, 17. Perez (Cadillac) +1m 32.453s, 18. Alonso (Aston Martin) +1 lap, 19. Bottas (Cadillac) +1 lap, 20. Albon (Williams) +2 laps.

Retirements: 21st lap: Bearman (Haas), **31st lap:** Stroll (Aston Martin).

Championship standings:

Drivers: 1. Antonelli 72 points, 2. Russell 63, 3. Leclerc 49, 4. Hamilton 41, 5. Norris 25, 6. Piastri 21, 7. Bearman 17, 8. Gasly 15, 9. Verstappen 12, 10. Lawson 10, 11. Lindblad 4, 12. Hadjar 4, 13. Bortoleto 2, 14. Sainz Jr. 2, 15. Ocon 1, 16. Colapinto 1.

Constructors: 1. Mercedes 135 points, 2. Ferrari 90, 3. McLaren 46, 4. Haas 18, 5. Alpine 16, 6. Red Bull 16, 7. Racing Bulls 14, 8. Audi 2, 9. Williams 2.

Lights to flag

THE JOURNEY IN NUMBERS AFTER THE 53-LAP RACE AT SUZUKA

1 Antonelli (19y 7m 4d) breaks Hamilton's record (22y 4m 6d) to become the youngest driver to lead the drivers' championship

1 Antonelli is the first driver to win multiple races as a teenager, and the first Italian to win consecutive races since Ascari in 1953

1 The Italian is the first whose first two wins have both been hat-tricks (pole, race win, fastest lap)

6 After three races, Red Bull sits P6 in the constructors' standings. Only in 2006, 2007 and 2008 was it in such a position after the first three races

6 For the first time since his Suzuka debut in 2009, Hamilton has finished the race in an even position (P6)

17 The number of times a team has won the first three races of a season. On every previous occasion, the outfit has gone on to win at least one of the two championships during that campaign

Every driver who has won at Suzuka since 2004 has either gone on to bag the drivers' title or finish at least as runner-up that season

18 Alonso and Aston Martin finally took the chequered flag in 2026

30 McLaren has become the first team to record as many as 30 top three finishes at the Japanese GP

52 Leclerc goes level with Raikkonen for the fourth most podiums by a Ferrari driver

88 Antonelli has led more laps than every other driver combined this season (Russell - 36, Leclerc - 23, Piastri - 16, Hamilton - 4)

315 Mercedes goes past Williams for most podium finishes in F1

500 The Japanese GP was the 500th round of the world championship to be won by the pole-sitter. Incidentally, the first race won from pole was also by an Italian (Farina, 1950 British GP)

Compiled by ANIRUDH VELAMURI

Verstappen says team's woes 'not sustainable'

Agence France-Presse
SUZUKA

A despondent Max Verstappen said Red Bull's problems were "not sustainable" and that he was looking forward to Formula One's extended break after another frustrating race on Sunday in Japan.

The four-time champion finished eighth in Suzuka, ending his four-year reign as Japanese Grand Prix champion in ruthless fashion.

Verstappen has cut a forlorn figure in Japan, calling his car "undriveable" after qualifying in a lowly 11th for the race.

"Yesterday was a disaster, today in the race I just maximised my race but the feeling in the car is just the same as qualifying," said Verstappen. "I was just trying to hang on to it basically in the race."

Verstappen has consistently railed against new Formula One regulations that see a 50-50 split between conventional and electrical power.

He will not compete again in F1 until the Miami Grand Prix on May 3, after the Bahrain and Saudi Arabia races scheduled for April were cancelled because of the war in the Middle East.

When asked how he would fill his time during the break, Verstappen answered: "I'll do some more racing, some stuff that makes me smile.

"And at the same time speak to the team as well, to try and find more pace and some more stable balance because this is not sustainable for us as a team," he added. "We need to work hard to understand our problems and bring improvements."

Formula One drivers call for safety changes after Bearman smash

Agence France-Presse
SUZUKA

Formula One drivers called for changes to protect their safety after Haas's Oliver Bearman slammed into a barrier at high speed at Sunday's Japanese Grand Prix.

The 20-year-old avoided serious injury after spinning off the track midway through the race, although he was limping heavily as he was helped off the course by stewards.

Different speeds

Sweeping new energy-saving regulations in F-1 this year mean cars can be travelling at drastically different speeds on the track at the same time.

Bearman was moving at high speed as he approached the slower Franco Colapinto and had to take evasive action to avoid hitting him.

Bearman. REUTERS

Williams driver Carlos Sainz called on racing authorities to make sure there was no repeat of the incident.

"As drivers, we have been extremely vocal that the problem is not only qualifying, it's also racing, and we were warning this type of accident was always going to happen," said the Spaniard.

"Here we were lucky there was an escape road – now imagine going to Baku, Singapore, Las Vegas and having this type of closing speeds, crashes next to the walls."

Structured review

The FIA said after the race that "a structured review would take place after the opening phase of the season".

"Any potential adjustments, particularly those related to energy management, require careful simulation and detailed analysis," the FIA said in a statement.

An X-ray revealed that Bearman had not suffered any fracture in the crash and he was cleared at the Suzuka track's medical centre.

He said he was "absolutely fine".

"It's a part of these new regulations that I guess we have to get used to, but also I felt like I wasn't really given much space given the huge excess speed that I was carrying," said the British driver.

"I think we've as a group warned the FIA what can happen, and this has been a really unfortunate result of a massive delta speed that we've never seen before in F-1 until these new regulations."

Indian boxers seek a strong start in Asian championships

Spearheads: Veterans Lovlina and Nikhat will carry the Indian hopes. FILE PHOTOS

Press Trust of India
ULAANBAATAR (MONGOLIA)

The Indian boxers will aim for a good show at the Asian Championships, beginning here on Monday, as they look to make the most of their opportunities in a packed season and secure direct berths for the multi-sport events later this year.

The tournament marks the first major outing in a loaded season that includes the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow (July-August), the Asian Games in Aichi-Nagoya, Japan (September-October) and the World Boxing Cup Finals in Uzbekistan.

The finalists will earn direct qualification for the Commonwealth Games and Asian Games, in line with the Boxing Federation of India's selection policy.

The Indian team has been acclimatising in Mongolia training in multinational camps and sparring with boxers from Mongolia, China, Jordan and Thailand. The women's challenge will be led by Lovlina Borgohain (75kg), Nikhat Zareen (51kg), Minakshi Hooda (48kg) and Jaismine Lamboria (57kg).

The men's team has ground to make up after a disappointing Worlds campaign last year, where the male boxers failed to win a medal for the first time in 12 years.

The teams: Men: Vishwanath Suresh (50kg), Jadumani Singh Mandengbam (55kg), Sachin (60kg), Aditya Pratap Yadav (65kg), Deepak (70kg), Akash (75kg), Ankush (80kg), Lokesh (85kg), Harsh Choudhary (90kg) and Narender Berwal (90+kg).

Women: Minakshi (48kg), Nikhat Zareen (51kg), Preeti Pawar (54kg), Jaismine Lamboria (57kg), Priya (60kg), Ankushita Boro (65kg), Arundhati Choudhary (70kg), Lovlina Borgohain (75kg), Pooja Rani (80kg) and Alfiya Tarannum Akram Khan Pathan (80+kg).

Two Indian teams stay on course for World athletics relays

ANI
CHANDIGARH

The members of the National men's longer relay and mixed 4x100m relay squad improved their global rankings on the Road to Gaborone26 at Chandigarh's Sector 7 Sports Complex. The World Athletics Relays will be held on May 2 and 3 in Gaborone, Botswana.

It was heartbreak for the men's 4x100m relay team as it was disqualified in the heats at the international invitational relay and the third National open relay competition on Saturday.

Manu T.S., Amoj Jacob, D. Chaudhary and Rajesh Ramesh were members of the 4x400m relay team that won gold in a time of 3:01.43s.

The Athletics Federation of India (AFI) fielded two teams in the mixed 4x100m event and members of both teams did exceedingly well, chief athletics coach Radhakrishnan Nair said.

The National-B mixed 4x100m relay team won gold in 42.30s to better the National record of 43.44s set by Tamil Nadu in 2025. India-A finished second in 42.34s. Maldives was third (44.53s).

The National mixed 4x400m and women's 4x100m relay squads are also strong contenders to clinch the tickets to Gaborone.

The women clocked 43.86s at the 2025 Gumi Asian athletics championships and were 23rd in the world rankings while the mixed squad was placed 22 on the basis of its performance (3:14.81) at the World relays in China.